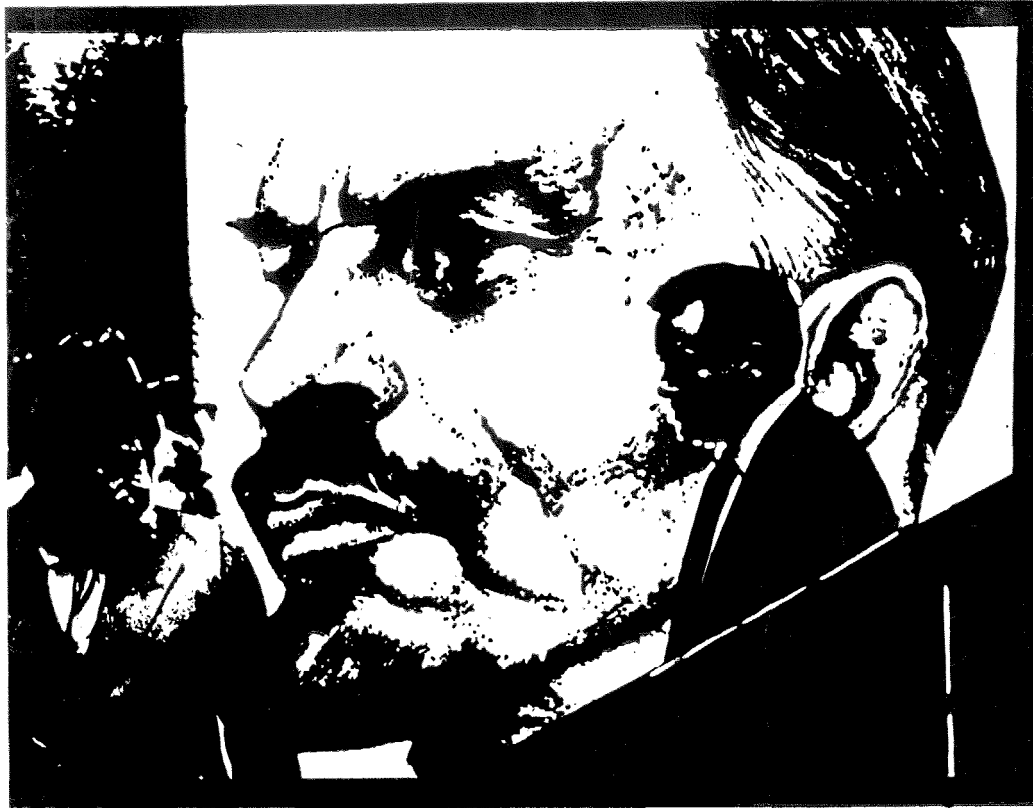


VOLUME 10: NUMBER 6

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The Journal of the Society for Education in Film and Television



SAMUEL FULLER : SETH HOLT

CELLAN JONES & THE CLASSIC SERIAL

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Foreword

We are printing interviews in this issue with the British film director, Seth Holt who began as an editor and moved, via production, to become a director, and with James Cellan Jones, the television director who is best known for his work on the Classic Serial. The former has worked intermittently in television and now has his own production company; the latter would like to direct films for the cinema.

We are also printing a first article by Vicki Eves on *Britain's Social Cinema* in which she argues that, in spite of a changed emphasis in the recognition of class conflict during the period of Free Cinema, the British Film Industry remains substantially unaltered in its handling of social issues. We are also printing an article on film hire in Great Britain which is especially relevant to teachers and members of film societies.

For some time now, we have wanted to publish some articles dealing with semiology where it affects film criticism. A projected review of Peter Wollen's book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* failed to materialize, as has an article dealing with the section of his book which deals with Eisenstein's aesthetics. We are, however, pleased to include in this issue two articles which look at his work: Andrew McTaggart raises a number of questions and, at the same time, attempts to relate the approach to the classroom situation, and Roy Armes has written a polemic, which attacks Peter Wollen's view of the *auteur* theory. It is hoped that Peter Wollen will be able to reply in the next issue.

We are also printing two articles on Samuel Fuller. The recent Edinburgh Festival and the screenings at the National Film Theatre has restimulated interest in his work. These articles, will, we hope, be found useful by educationalists interested in the *genres* in which he works.

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SETH HOLT

interviewed by Kevin Gough-Yates

Seth Holt was born in 1923 and became an assistant editor in 1942. In 1958 he directed *Nowhere to Go* and has since made *Taste of Fear* ('61), *Station Six Sahara* ('62), *The Nanny* ('65) and *Danger Route* ('67). *Monsieur Lecocq* was stopped in production.

Kevin Gough-Yates has written for *Studio International*, and *Films and Filming* and lectures in Film and TV at Hornsey College of Art. He is working on a book on German Expressionist Cinema.



Nowhere to Go: Gregg unknowingly kills his accomplice

SH: I started life as an actor with the Liverpool Rep. and then I went on to a company at Bideford in Devon where I acted with Paul Scofield. In fact, I have a bill of *Berkeley Square* with my name starred above Paul Scofield's: But during the war I went into documentary films as an assistant editor – with Strand, in fact. The boss there was Donald Taylor. There were all sorts of interesting people there – Dylan Thomas for one. Quite quickly I was given a little film to compile. There had been a lot of rushes and nobody had done anything with them but it had to be delivered. Nobody was particularly interested in it but it gave me the opportunity to edit. I did quite well there and then I moved into features. Funnily enough I wasn't all that keen to move into them because documentaries had a certain status which features hadn't yet achieved in this country. One was much nearer the movie makers in documentary but in features you might be the fifth assistant's cutter's nark. In some ways features were a step back. Actually, Robert Hamer wanted me – he was my brother in law – to go over there. I went as first assistant. I was never very good as a filing clerk but I used to get little bits to do. This must have been about 1941. I was an assistant for a long time but finally got a picture by Robert Hamer in 1949 called *The Spider and the Fly* which had Eric Portman and Guy Rolfe in it and this gave me my first credit although I had cut quite a bit on *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. The editor there was Peter Tanner. I cut little bits of *Scott* too; I did the Antarctic sequence. I also had a memorable appearance as the voice of the Blizzard on the soundtrack. And so I cut pictures at Ealing. I did *Lavender Hill Mob* and *Mandy*, *Titfield Thunderbolt* and a terrible film called *Dance Hall*. I didn't cut *The Ladykillers* I was associate producer.

KGY: What did you think of Robert Hamer as a cutter?

SH: He was a fine writer, I think he was almost a finer writer than he was anything else. *Kind Hearts and Coronets* is a beautifully written piece. Johnny Dighton also worked on it but it was still very much Robert. He had that sort of slightly Edwardian wit. Robert had real style of that kind although in some ways his best film was *It Always Rains on Sunday*.

KGY: Would you say he had any kind of influence on you?

SH: He had an influence on me as a *person* outside of films but I don't think he had any as a film maker. I've never been to school in the proper way and he would lend me all the right books. I was much younger than he, and he was very thoughtful that way.

KGY: Are there directors whom you would say have been an influence on you.

SH: As a kid, the Warner B gangster movies were my great love. Fritz Lang is a great man as far as I'm concerned and Buñuel is the greatest director of the lot. On the other hand, I don't think he influences me at all. Of course I do like his mordant humour and maybe I do try to get in a little of that.

KGY: You're much more adventurous than someone like Lang, as far as the camera is concerned, don't you think?

SH: Yes I suppose so but I don't move it around as much as people think I do. I move it around much more in the cutting. I'm very much a cutting director. I like to leave it loose so there are things still to be done. I always look forward to the cutting stages. I'm much more happy in the cutting room than on the floor. I enjoy things on the floor but the actual making is in the cutting room. You're gathering raw material on the floor as far as I'm concerned.

KGY: Do you think the Warner films affected your style of film making?

SH: Oh yes! They used to be pretty stylish and they had a certain kind of realism which we tend to overlook. I was very impressed, for example, by *The Roaring Twenties*.

KGY: Well, it's by Raoul Walsh.

SH: That's right. Those are the kind of people I, consciously, steal from. I like the slickness about them.

KG: What happened when you became an associate producer? Didn't you work on *Touch and Go*?

SH: That's right, there was also *Man in the Sky* which was directed by Charlie Creighton. It's quite a good film, actually, although it wasn't widely recognized at the time. All the films I produced had scripts by Bill Rose.

KGY: How did you come to be working as a producer at all?

SH: I asked. They were making producers at Ealing. I was highly regarded by all the directors there. They always wanted me to work on their films as an editor and indeed often asked for me as an associate producer. But I was passed over at the time when Balcon was appointing new A.P.'s, which annoyed me. So I went and asked and, in fact, produced two films simultaneously. They had great doubts about me as I was regarded as an artistic fellow with no knowledge of the hard facts of production. But

in reality, you didn't need to know much about them at Ealing. Some people did. Some were experts in different fields, some were even production managers. But a lot of producers came from scripting or from art direction.

KGY: Why did you want to produce in the first place?

SH: Well, I wanted to direct, didn't I, and that was the step at Ealing. At Ealing the first year you were an A.P. then you were a director. I've never wanted to do anything much more than edit and direct. I came into the business to be a director and it was a conscious step, though I could perhaps have got on much quicker than I did.

KGY: Is this how you came to be making *Nowhere to Go*?

SH: That came about when Ealing had sold out the studio and moved over to MGM. Ken Tynan had just joined us. We both liked this book by Donald Mackenzie, who was one of the prison intelligentsia – he's been inside and written books. So Ken and I wrote the script together. I did the action bits and he did the dialogue.

KGY: Structurally, it's quite easy to follow but looking at the reviews of the time, people found it very confusing.

SH: Yes they did, simply because for those days it was fairly obliquely told. In fact, I think it's very simple for an audience but perhaps not quite so simple for the critics. I was determined that if we had a criminal as a central figure then we would not have this element of self pity that was so prevalent in those days.

SH: There was a whole passage in the book where Greg's criminality was explained away by the fact that he was a paratrooper or a commando, and had been taught his violence that way. We made no reference to that at all. He is what he is and you either accept him or you don't. It was really an attempt to watch that kind of mind at work. We wanted to see him from the point of view of his escape first, in order to get the kind of prisoner he is, the whole feel of how he walked and moved and was, without dialogue. And then, of course, when he's in the flat we have the flashback sequence.

KGY: The shot in the flat is very elaborate isn't it?

SH: We wanted to give the idea of freedom for him but I don't normally do that kind of thing an awful lot because I rarely find it pays off. But I think it does there.

KGY: How did you work the shot out? It's far ahead of its time.

SH: Well, we actually designed the set for the shot. I think it *was*, ahead of its time although one had seen things a bit like it. We wanted to get the whole atmosphere right.

KGY: Of course, the first shots of the film are the train which implants the idea of getting away. You can't really distinguish the prison: you've just a huge wall. The only dialogue is from the warders saying things like 'Everything O.K.' You don't even see the escape.

SH: Yes. The warders were almost voices off. And then we see someone actually climb into a prison. That was a new thing. As far as the flashback is concerned there was little that was comparable in those days: the way we tell the story of the confidence trick and of the robbery and the meeting of the Bessie Love character at the ice-hockey rink was, I suppose, influenced by *Citizen Kane* where Kane and his wife sit down to breakfast and there are cuts all the time to a much more advanced stage of the relationship.

KGY: There's a little Langian touch there isn't there? When he says goodbye to her after the ice-hockey sequence, there's a cut to the newspaper clip.

SH: Yes, that is a bit like Lang. We felt we actually had to make that point. The plot has to be hard and clear. It's all there if you care to look, is the principle on which it was made.

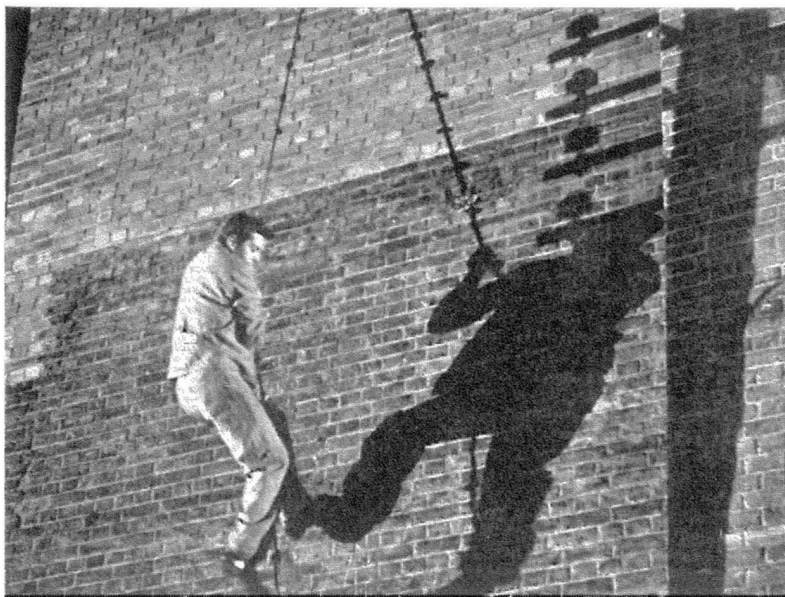
KGY: An unusual feature in the film is the way that sequences, like those with the surgical boot, are not explained for a considerable time. After all, we see him taking the money to the vault, wearing it, long before we ever find out why he put it on in the first place.

SH: A lot of things are not explained until they emerge in their proper function. It leaves people asking the question 'What is it?' The answer 'Nobody looks a cripple in the eye'. What I was trying to do was a new technique of getting the audience to ask 'What the fuck is this man up to?' It's a kind of cerebral suspense technique where the audience is engaged mentally. The sand in the petshop is another example. People ask 'What the devil does he want that for? What's he doing this for – pouring it on the floor?' It's very satisfying when a solution comes.

KGY: How do you feel the film holds together at the end?

SH: I like the end very much; I like that sort of nothing ending.

KGY: It seems to me to deal with inability to plan and organize one's life – life has a direction of its own.



Nowhere to Go: Gregg escapes over the prison wall in the opening sequence

SH: That's right! He can't come to terms with it. There's no other way out for him. And I think that's very true to life. Once the paranoia stops working the whole thing goes to pieces.

KGY: Although I like the end sequence with the tractor, how do you feel about him falling across the horn? I think it's slightly obvious and very much of its time.

SH: Possibly, yes. I still quite like it; I like it because of the way the rear view mirror catches him as the door slumps open.

KGY: Yes it's better visually than it is sound.

SH: That's quite true. I was a bit unhappy about the actual quality of the horn. It's curious how tiny little things like that matter. I tried very hard but that was the best we came up with. I was a bit more timid in those days.

KGY: Were you very conscious of your style? It doesn't look very British.

SH: I was very anxious to make something rather stylish. I said one thing I wanted to do was the least Ealing film ever made.

KGY: In spite of that, were you left alone? Did Balcon interfere?

SH: No. They were very good. In the end he ratted on me slightly by agreeing with MGM to cut out a quarter of an hour of the

film. It might not have been a mistake, I don't know. They were good sequences that went. One was with Lily Kahn; one was with a girl that plays his wife in a flashback to her visit to prison. They were good acting sequences. The visit to prison is a very good scene, utterly flat and miserable. On the other hand I must confess you don't have to have it.

KGY: It doesn't sound very central to the film. The Maggie Smith character is a bit like that too. Do you not feel that her appearance in the night club is very convenient?

SH: Well, I think there are certain things but I don't think it matters if you are enjoying it. I don't mind coincidences. They don't embarrass me as much as they do some people. Stranger things happen in life.

KGY: Ealing must have closed about this time? What happened then?

SH: I was out on my ear and didn't get any work at all for a long time. I haven't had a great deal of work in any case over the years, when you think of it. *Nowhere to Go* dropped like a stone. I like to think, if it had been about two years later, people would have noticed it.

KGY: The jazz score, for instance, is well integrated.

SH: Exactly! It was a very early jazz score and I think it must have been the first English one. It's my favourite score and I love it. I was given a free hand on that thank goodness. We didn't have the usual composer in with the lengths of film. I just sat the musicians down to play a piece and gave them a brief that I wanted it to be cool yet dirty and that it should have a kind of mocking quality about it. They did it beautifully. The musicians weren't bothered with where it had to go. I used it as a piece of editing and this seems to me to be a more satisfactory way of working than the traditional way of getting the composer to write stretches of music for specific scenes. I don't think you get the ironies right that way. I talked a lot to them about the character; Dizzy Reece seemed to understand.

KGY: If you were out of work what did you do?

SH: I went back to cutting. I did a thing for Charlie Chricton at Beaconsfield – *The Battle of the Sexes* with Peter Sellers. Then I did some of the very first *Danger Mans*. I think I did the very first pilot. Then I was offered *Taste of Fear*. I hadn't done a proper movie for two years. Somebody ran *Nowhere to Go* at Hammer and they liked it very much. They hadn't seen it when it came out.

KGY: The whole script looks very derivative to me, though it looks like your idea to have the body being fished out of the water unexplained at the beginning, over the titles. All the way through the film I wondered how that related to the main story.

SH: It's a gimmick really, a hook for the audience.

KGY: To what extent is Susan Strasberg a villainess in the film? The point I'm making is that very early on you have a dialogue sequence at the dinner table with her and Ann Todd. You have a candelabra and there are some shots which show each of them with two candles to one side of their head. I thought then that they were obviously related people. When Ann Todd sits in the wheelchair and gets mistaken for Penny Appleby, I thought this was a clarification of the same point.

SH: I don't know. If so it's unconscious. I just thought that was a pretty way of doing it. It just balanced up the cuts nicely.

KGY: You don't sound as if you were very sympathetic to it as a script. Do you think there was anything good about the film?

SH: Yes I do. I think it's quite frightening in spots.

KGY: What do you think of that long dialogue sequence in the car with the chauffeur in the beginning?

SH: I was trying to make all that rather mysterious. I just saw that opening with the black car. I saw it more as a kind of visual impending something or other. I was trying to play a bit on the murkiness. I quite deliberately used the lighting and the shadows in the air terminal. I think a lot of it, from my point of view has to do with the progress and movement of the cutting which puts the audience on edge without them quite knowing why. It's deliberately full of ambiguousness.

KGY: Are you aware of how you create tension and ambiguity?

SH: I'm aware I'm trying to do it. How I do it, I'm not quite sure. I think it has a lot to do with the cuts. I always imagine myself in the cinema and I try and construct the film as if I am sitting watching it. Obviously that's a much too easy thing to say because at the same time one's operating complicated technical equipment. But I *do* keep referring back to what I feel like, as it were, sitting there with my mouth open. Even in the shooting I am thinking about the putting together of it though I don't think too closely. I just know what I need: a bit of this and a bit of that and let's have some of this. I'm putting the ingredients out for cooking.

KG: The most disturbing shot in the film is when Susan Strasberg is being wheeled forward into the bedroom and the camera facing her moves forward too, and then pans to take in more of the room.

SH: That's a real genuine crab. That was just a feel for the movement. I thought it would give just a little kind of edge.

KGY: To what extent did Hammer control the film? Because there are things that give me the impression that you wouldn't have done them.

SH: Well, the finance controlled it completely. Lots of it was tied together with string but I don't think it looks like it. Time and



Nowhere to Go: Gregg puts on the surgical boot. 'No one looks a cripple in the eye'

money force you into doing certain things. I had to do it right. I didn't want to be overscheduled, for after having been out of work as long as I had, I was anxious to be a good boy.

KGY: The first time she sees the father's body and dashes away, there's a cut back to the body staring after her. This looks very like Hammer because you then know that it can't be her hallucination. It's very brief but her back's certainly turned to the dead body.

SH: I don't suspect I wanted you to think it was subjective. I can't remember the exact cut. It may simply have been some cut away to overcome some technical difficulty.

KGY: Did you contribute anything to the development of the script?

SH: Only the very nasty scene between the chauffeur and Ann Todd – the sex scene. That was my idea. Right at the end there's a rather appalling sex scene when she's trying to make love to him and it's very much the young man and the old lady. If you are actually going to take the plot seriously, it must have been a pretty squalid relationship and I wanted to touch on that.

KGY: But you don't seem very attached to it like you are to *Nowhere to Go*.

SH: Well, I'm not, but I'm not ashamed of it. It actually did quite well. I thought I'd done well enough to get a better job. They paid me very little. When I went back to them to do *The Nanny* it was a new deal.

KGY: What happened after *Taste of Fear*?

SH: I did the odd series and commercials.

KGY: How many of these have you done?

SH: I don't do that many and I haven't done any for about two years now. I've been on the bread line practically. Compared with a lot of other directors I've done very little commercial work. I've done far less than Lindsay Anderson for example. Eventually I got *Station Six Sabara*. Gene Gutowski brought me this subject. It was a sort of dirty film really but there was something in it that was quite interesting. Then I learnt by accident that Bryan Forbes had originally brought this subject to CCC films's attention and had promised in the little writing in the contract to do a stint at the end. He did a rewrite in four days. It wasn't perfect but it was a lot better than what I had in the first instance. Through Bryan Forbes we got on to British Lion and through Gene we got hold of Carroll Baker and the thing

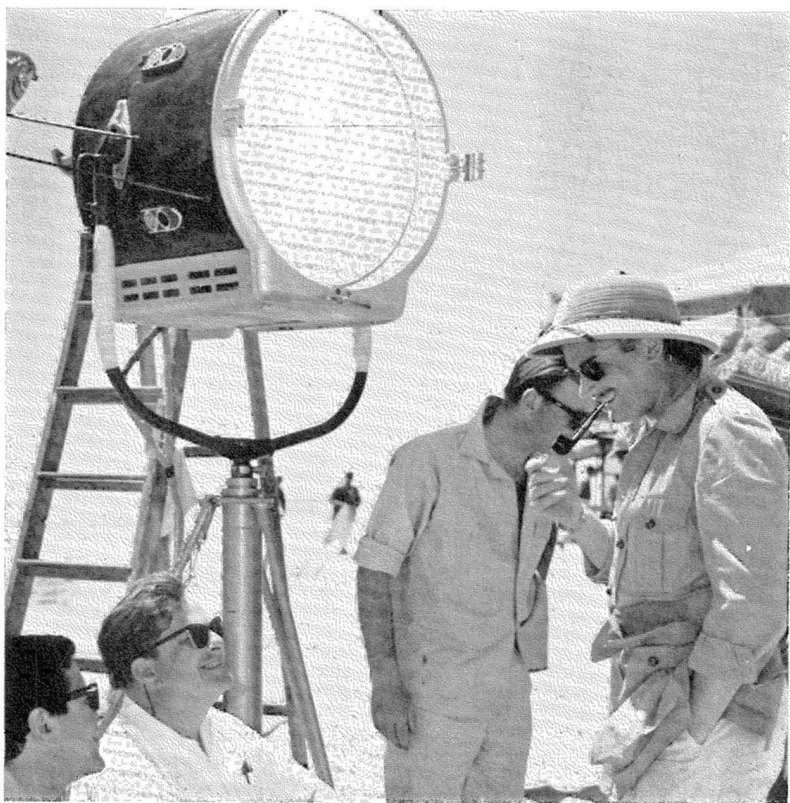
started to assemble itself. It had a whole history of German, Spanish co-production. Finally it was a British German co-production. We had Peter Van Eyck, Mario Adorf and Jorg Felmy. The thing I liked about it was the men story which I thought was very promising. And, of course, we had Carroll Baker.

KGY: What about the way she appears in the film so suddenly? This irritated a lot of people.

SH: Well, it's like in *Nowhere to Go* really. I refuse to countenance any justification. It was a little coincidence. I think if people think of these things then they don't like the picture.

KGY: It is important to you that all the characters are cut off?

SH: Oh yes! It's like a western, at one level, coming into the desert, getting on each other's nerves. I usually try to get one little theme in which I'm interested and I was interested in the paucity of romantic love and decent sex. The meat-waggon coming in at



A location shot on *Station Six Sahara*, Seth Holt talks to Denholm Elliott

the end is to me a happy ending. The rough guy goes off with a whore and has a good bang, which is good healthy stuff, as opposed to the romantic level at which Peter van Eyck operates, which is dreary, hypocritical and self-deluding. The whole film is about hypocrisy in a way; the nicest character is the dirty Glaswegian (Ian Bannen) and the nastiest is the wanking major (Denholm Elliott).

KGY: There's no sexuality in your two previous films.

SH: Well, *Nowhere to Go* didn't, simply because I think it's an awful lie in the stories where criminals are on the run and they take time off to bang ladies. I don't think a man in a desperate situation would do that.

KGY: How did you come to be mixed up at all with people like Reisz and Richardson?

SH: Well, Lindsay was the first one of them that I met down at Ealing when he was writing that book on the Thorold Dickinson movie *Secret People*. Then Karel Reisz's book on editing was given to me to review for *Sight and Sound*. I reviewed it kindly. It's not a bad book actually, as far as you can write about those things in that way. But it's much better to give a student Pudovkin where he'll actually understand what the man is doing. I will say this for Karel, that when we were working on *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* he turned round to me and said, 'Well, I didn't really know what the hell I was talking about did I?' You can see the roots of the whole book. In my view the magic is still in the Pudovkin.

KGY: Did they like your work?

SH: I don't know actually. Karel asked me to come onto *Saturday Night* but I didn't know whether to or not. Well, I didn't know whether it would be a bad thing to drop down to being an editor again. But I was fascinated by the script and did it. While I was doing that, Tony Richardson had difficulties with *The Entertainer* which British Lion had refused to accept, which is a pretty rough situation to be in with a completed film. I worked hard straightening out the story line by editing, because it was in chaos. I also did something quite personal. When Olivier is reading the telegram saying that his son is dead and he lets out a wail which is supposed to top the noise of the blues singer wailing in the night – a pretty corny notion anyway, and a piece of writing which asks the actor the impossible – I held on to the close-up of Olivier to the last moment and cut to the brass band playing and lost his great wail, which to me was sheer embarrassment. I persuaded Tony that this was right but

I believe that Olivier was terribly annoyed. I never heard a word from Woodfall from that point onwards.

KGY: How much did you contribute to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*?

SH: I think quite a lot and I don't think Karel would deny it. One works for a director but I did argue with him and often won him over with logic. There were extraordinarily long documentary sequences in the film but he saw they had to go on the floor in the end. Editing isn't just cutting out; it's rhythm and so on. Karel was extremely generous about my contribution.

KGY: Have you had any contact with Lindsay Anderson?

SH: I initiated *If*. I had the script originally and took it to him with the writers. The script was given to me as a possible film and I worked on it with the writers for some time but then I took it to Lindsay. It was actually my property. I didn't want to do it but it took me a long time to discover it. I thought Lindsay would like it and he did. He's always acknowledged this but I don't work within that kind of movement because although I like their work I'm not that kind of a film maker. It's possibly because our backgrounds are different. I came up the hard way, as an actor, and they all come from universities.

KGY: Of course, in your films you don't have the same level of caricature; of class types, do you? Do you share their political outlook?

SH: Well, I do take a moral stand towards the characters. I realize there must also be some kind of political stance. I'd hate to think that my films were right wing.

KGY: There are a couple of touches in *Nowhere to Go* which are a bit like the weak sociological touches of some of their films. I'm thinking especially of the appearance of the Happy Wanderers in Oxford Street.

SH: You might think that. Anyway it was their first appearance on the screen. Other people used them after that. But really, I wouldn't describe it as a political attitude that I adopt, it's really an attitude towards life. I'm very snobbish about certain things, like everyone else, even though some of it may be inverted. But taking *Station Six Sahara* as an example, I prefer the Glaswegian character to the major. You might want to think of that as a political preference. The officer class isn't one of my favourite things. But then I can imagine a whole film about an officer I might like. Really it's a much more moral and psychological thing.

KGY: There's a very human scene when the central figure in *Nowhere to Go* finds that he has killed Bernard Lee. It's the dialogue scene in the car where the gangster refuses to get mixed up with him but gives him £20, as if out of pity.

SH: I like that. I'm greatly attached to the criminal classes in many ways. On the other hand, of course, they can be horrifying. I find it so difficult to take up a political attitude about that sort of thing.

KGY: You wouldn't go along with the kind of attitudes expressed by Lindsay Anderson in his articles like 'Stand Up Stand Up' and 'Get out and Push'.

SH: No, I don't think I would. They seem to me to express immature attitudes though I know mature can mean stupid. I certainly think they have an unwise way of looking at things. I'm really a journeyman moviemaker. I'm very much more of an artist that way than a political thinker, so I'm more concerned with what it appears like to me visually, stylistically and morally but I don't try to take a political framework to my material. That's why I wanted to put that sex scene in *Taste of Fear*. Incidentally, do you know that title was mine? It comes from *Macbeth*.

KGY: What happened since *Station Six*?

SH: Well of course there's *The Nanny* and *Danger Route*. Have you seen that?

KGY: Yes, but it's not very good is it?

SH: No. It's dreadful. I scarcely saw it finished. I had a very difficult schedule. I was waiting between one and another and I needed the bread.

KGY: Well why are you doing things like that, when you have projects like *Gratz*?

SH: Well you know that's an original by J. P. Donleavy and we evolved it together. I asked him about it quite recently and he's writing a novel based on it and so he's not interested in the film rights although he had at one point given it me.

KGY: And what about Myddleton's *Women Beware Women*?

SH: Well again, there is a script extant of that – a translation into modern terms set on an Onassis type yacht used by a gangster and his entourage. He, of course, is equivalent to the Duke. It's an attempt to produce the feeling of a Renaissance court – the hangers on and so forth. But I don't know who it belongs to now. Recently I've been developing my own subjects with



Station Six Sahara: Carroll Baker stands over the bed of her injured ex-husband

writers like John Howlet. Paul Mayersberg is doing something for me at the moment. I like to work closely with the writer. My belief is that directors ought to direct everything and I always wanted to work this way. I think it'll pay off but it takes a long time. I turn down quite a bit but I don't turn down anything I can see any promise in. I admit I wouldn't get involved in a *Danger Route* again, though I would prefer to do that than something which has domestic status or pretends to, because then you start lying. At least *Danger Route* is a fairy tale. I like to think I'm not stylistically bound to any one kind of film. I'd hate to think of myself as just a maker of thrillers.

KGY: What about *Monsieur Lecoq*?

SH: Oh, that was with Columbia and it was a disaster. It had Zero Mostel in it. They stopped it. I'm the fall guy for it. I think it's the best footage I've shot by a long way and it's extremely funny, weird, broad comedy, total farce. As you know, M. Lecoq was a detective. He was pre-Sherlock Holmes, as a master mind detective, and we had Zero playing him in a preposterous phoney French way, set in Arles. We shot an enormous amount there. It's set in the late 1890's. There are some crazy time lapses and it's up to date finally at the end. It's quite ridiculous, way out farce. It was a very difficult task to discover the right style.

KGY. How did it come to be set up in the first place?

SH: MGM wanted to make *The ABC Murders* with Zero Mostel playing Hercule Poirot. Zero could only think of it in terms of the broadest comedy and he, together with the writer, assembled the script. Zero doesn't really write, but he does you little bits and the writer puts it down. He's a very extravagant comic but has suffered in the cinema from being restricted. I was called in and Zero took a great liking to me and put a lot of faith in me. He was really the prime mover, but we brought in a script of which they were terrified and we finally stormed out. They incidentally made a totally different script under the same name but Zero hadn't forgotten this notion of the French policeman. He discovered M. Lecoq who was even nearer to what we were trying for. We didn't think Agatha Christie's *ABC Murders* could be made except as an extravagant spoof film based on Zero's extremely funny impersonation of a Frenchman. It was blackish comedy and *M. Lecoq* would have been too. *M. Lecoq* was a development of it. Zero wanted me to do it, but I doubt if I was ever *persona grata* with Columbia. We had Ronnie Corbett, Akim Tamiroff and John le Mesurier in it too. I think it was extremely funny. But Carl Foreman, who was the overseer of this production, came back from making *McKenna's Gold*. We had had all sorts of cock ups in the production department. So in terms of the schedule we were floundering a bit. But the rushes were great. But there it stands. They decided not to continue it, though nearly two thirds of it is shot.

KGY: Was Carl Foreman responsible for stopping production?

SH: Carl Foreman originally. He worked on material with my cutter and decided he thought it was rather funny after all but the Columbia committee threw it out. It *was* running over budget and over schedule but it was the fault of the front office. They kept moving me around and we lost a lot of time like that. They kept moving me inside when it was raining when I wanted to stay put to finish the sequence. Because every time you wrap up you lose half a day, so you might as well stay put until the rain stops. I've shot in the rain; I'm not fussy about that kind of thing. It was quite funny in the rain. *M. Lecoq* would have been the biggest thing I'd done and if it had come out, it would have done me a lot of good, I think, although on the other hand I would hate to be cast as the director for Zero Mostel because I was effacing myself in that film. I was interested in it because no one seems to be able to put a comic genius on the screen these days and that was the task I set myself. It is very much a self effacing task for a director. You don't mess about with a camera.

You set up the routines right and, talking as a cutter, you give yourself little loopholes so that you can let them *ad lib* but can get them back onto the tracks again. It's *very* hard to do. The cinema is very bad at putting great comics over.

KGY: What about Jacques Tati and Jerry Lewis?

SH: Right! Tati does it but there's no-one else. I don't know much about Jerry Lewis.

KGY: As we've brought up the question of producers, what problems have emerged for you working with them?

SH: There are so many producers who are really not producers but promoters of finance. They steal from the films in order to keep alive; there are very few actual producers. I'm not talking about production managers, I mean working producers that are involved with the process of film making. Maybe there isn't a place for them but I tend to think there is. There should be a shoulder for the director. Of course director-producers are the thing that's happening now and this is the thing we all try to do but it's only because you can't find somebody to produce. At least, it is in my case. Producing is an art. The Kordas of this world are not negligible people. How many people are there producing that know how to direct? The producer should, of course, know it all though, of course, he doesn't need to be a great director to be a good producer. When I was an associate producer I was concerned with the scripts, the casting etc. I knew about cutting. I was a sounding board for the director in many cases. You can influence a director but I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing.

I must tell you about an Italian movie which again got stopped – *Diabolique*. Actually it didn't get stopped, it ran out of money. *Diabolique* was a character like Fantoma. We had Jean Sorel, Elsa Martinelli and Roland Gilbert. This was for an independent producer Antonio Cervi who produced some early Antonionis. It was mismanaged and so the film came to an end and everybody went home. Everybody is suing everybody. I got paid actually because I knew the Italian scene. They make films on IOU's out there – *cambiaires* they call them. They actually give a bank an IOU. You don't have to have a cent. But knowing about this I had my money put in Escrow which means they put your fee into a bank where it's frozen. I also stipulated that I wouldn't move out of my hotel room unless the expenses came every morning. I just sat there and waited for a little man to come up with the lire.

KGY: Has a producer ever been of help to you?

SH: I haven't really had a producer. I'd like someone to whom I could decently go and say, 'I really need another week and I'll tell you why. I know I haven't got a week in the schedule, but is there a way you can help?' I want somebody who is not going to say simply 'NO'! But someone who will actually figure with me if there is a way of doing it. I really would like to have a producer who knows how to produce, someone who won't simply come back from seeing the rushes and say 'They're OK' or 'They stink', but someone who will discuss it with you. I want someone whom you respect.

KGy: Do you think there is such a thing as a good producer?

SH: Well it's usually your editor if you choose him right. If he's good he'll talk to you seriously about what you're doing. I played very much this role on *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The director needs encouragement like anybody else. Of course, the director's job is to encourage everyone on the floor. If it's done well it can help a director enormously. This is why some directors go rogue and defy producers and produce very bad works. There are many instances of directors, the bigger they got the worse they got.

KGy: Would you like to name any?

SH: Well, no – yes Huston. I don't think he's directed a really good movie since *Asphalt Jungle*, certainly not with the talent and skill that he had.

KGy: Have you tried to initiate ideas? For yourself to work on?

SH: The company I run at the moment is based on this principle. Some of them are original ideas, some of them are properties. There's David Chantler's *A Piece of the Action* which is a nice script about a crap dealer in Las Vegas; it's also a love story and an original of Dave's. There are parallels in *The Hustler* – it also has the same colour of a western. It's about a man who comes and loses his gratuity at a crap game and has to become a dealer. He meets a girl but it's very much a back scene Las Vegas story. It's more about the real people that live there than the tourists who go and spend their money there. We're marketing the completed script at the moment. Bob Aldrich was very interested in it, with me directing it, funnily enough. He's one of my fans. But I think he's too involved with other things at the moment, his own problems with his own studio. When one is selling, one is, in a way, hawking the script but one endeavours to do it much more subtly. You get people who are interested in it with enough money to push it a stage further. We try to get it sufficiently developed to start making a package. We get

artists interested and so forth. Dave's script is a very big one in terms of cast.

KGY: Does a package deal include a cameraman?

SH: No. Not the cameraman but the director, a key artist or perhaps two. You take that to a distributor before they start to make their own contribution. A producer would also help. If Bob Aldrich takes us up he would, of course, be the producer. Commonwealth are very interested in the script of *The Velvet We'll* that John Howlet wrote which I worked with him on as a director. It's a sort of psychological thriller. This would be a film which I would direct. It will be produced by Halsey Rains who came to me with the property.

KGY: Do you actually produce a budget when you're offering it to a distributor?

SH: We do, but it's much better to get the person financing to do their budget though of course we have a rough idea of what it's going to cost.

Another property we have is *Lady into Fox* which is by David Garnet and a minor classic of the twenties. It's being written by Paul Mayersberg who is also a director of this company. I'm after something by Evelyn Waugh that I won't tell you the title of. It's the one nobody will ever want. We've also got the script by A. A. Alvarez called *The Anarchist* based on the life of Bakunin.

KGY: What is the function of your company, Holtmallinson?

SH: The development and packaging of properties. I don't have to direct all the films, but I'm prepared to direct them all. I've worked on all of them. But I couldn't direct them all if everything happened.

A thing you might be interested in: we made a documentary called *Barbed Water* about open boat whaling in the Azores. It's an hour long and there are two versions. I feel it's a rather handsome movie. They go out in an open boat with hand held harpoons and no guns or anything, and actually fight these whales and bring them back. I was executive producer on this.

KGY: What role does this mean you played?

SH: Well, as you've guessed, it meant I cut it basically. I'm only joking. Actually we had a very good cutter on the film but I did have a lot of influence on it. I produced it in the sense that I encouraged the director and influenced the way it was put together. The director is virtually new. I set it up, found the money. I'm not very good at that but I did it anyhow.

If I have any political attitude it'll be clearer in that than in anything because I had a lot to do with the way the material had to be arranged. It's very moving in a quite distant way. The things I'm interested in are people's attitudes towards savagery and violence, which is also a good thing as well as a bad thing. These people are heroic and there's no other way of describing them. They must be very much like the Greek heroes with a very curious attitude about life. What they do dignifies them.

KGY: Can you describe the process by which money was raised for the film?

SH: It was a very hazardous operation indeed. The film finally cost £45,000 which is pretty steep for a 'doco' running fifty minutes – a television hour. We're trying to market it on the networks in the States. We raised £5,000 originally from the brother of our technical advisor to whom I gave the credit of producer. He knows more about the sperm whale than any man alive. We took the momentous decision to send them out on the basis of this and then we raised £5,000 elsewhere. Then we went to a private bank who put up the rest of it. We had a row with them over something and my brother, who is a solicitor, got in some private investors to take out the loan and take it over to another bank. And then we got the last £10,000 from the NFFC and that was like drawing teeth. We'd finished the film by the time we'd raised the money. The NFFC are all right really. They wanted 12½ per cent participation and had agreed it long before we'd completed our finance. All they wanted to know was that they were the last £10,000 and of course they also have to have first position out; 12½ per cent and bank interest were their terms. We were giving to our investors 6 per cent per £5,000. They just took half a per cent more. The amount of documentation you have to have for them is quite hair-raising. I'm sure it's just because it's a government body. But we were cliff hanging at the end with debtors at the door. On features they operate differently. They make the director sign the schedule. I think they put some money into *Station Six Sabara*. None of my films has lost money.

August 29th, 1969.

MILTON SUBOTSKY

The Work of the Film Producer

This is a shortened transcript of a talk given to film students in Film and TV Studies at Hornsey College of Art on 18th June, 1969.

HOW A PICTURE IS PUT TOGETHER

The primary job of a producer is to get the money to finance a film. The way to do this is to have a book, a screenplay, a director or a star who is financeable, preferably a combination of two or more of these. A producer can buy an option on a book and put up his own money and have a writer turn it into a screenplay, but this can be very expensive as he may then find that no one will finance the film. Sometimes, a producer with a good production record can take a book to a distribution company and, if they like it, they will put up the money to option it and have a screenplay written. It can then take anywhere from two months to two years before one finally gets a good screenplay. The writer usually does a structural outline or treatment first. If this is acceptable he goes ahead with the first draft screenplay, which is read and re-read and discussed before the final screenplay is written. Sometimes a second or even third writer must be put on before a good screenplay can be obtained. The screenplay is the most important single item in the making of a film. It is very difficult to make a bad film out of a good script and impossible to make a good film out of a bad script.

If the distribution company approve the screenplay they will ask the producer how much it will cost to make the film. The producer then has to give the company a budget. To do a budget, he must first make a shooting schedule (some producers don't get involved in this side of it, but have it done by employees).

SCHEDULE SHOOTING

Many factors have to be taken into account in preparing a shooting schedule: how much the leading actors will cost and how you can best condense the number of weeks needed to shoot their parts, thus saving money by engaging them for the shortest possible time; what sets will be needed, how much they will cost to build and how long it will take to construct each of them; how much space will be required for each set; what stages to use (a knowledge of the 'best buys' at each studio is helpful here); what locations will be needed and where to shoot them (the closer to the studio the better); the order in which the film is to be shot. The schedule is made in consultation with the director, art director, construction manager and production manager of the film. A good shooting schedule can save thousands of pounds in the production of a film and a bad one cost thousands. Once a realistic schedule is made an accurate budget can be prepared.

BUDGET AND CREW

The form a budget takes is standard throughout the film industry. It is broken down into various departments and categories and is divided into pre-production, production and post-production (editing, post-synching, dubbing and other finishing costs). The production personnel budgeted for and what they do are chiefly as follows:

The production manager, who is put on the picture about eight weeks before shooting and stays until several weeks after, is the person who organizes and controls the physical production and logistics of the picture.

The first assistant director comes on the picture two to three weeks before shooting and his job is to work closely with the director prior to shooting, prepare a breakdown of the script with him, showing exactly what will be needed on each set, and keep things organized and moving on the set during shooting.

The second assistant director is the person who prepares the call sheet each day and knows where everyone is at any time – artists, etc.

The third assistant director is more or less a runner and is rarely on the set, but the job can be a stepping stone to second assistant, then to first assistant.

The continuity girl is a very important person with, usually, a great deal of experience in films. She works closely with the director during shooting and is responsible for exact continuity – such things as seeing that if a character is smoking while saying a line in one shot, he is doing so with exactly the same length of cigarette held in the same position

on the same line in another set-up of the same sequence. For each camera set-up, she makes out a continuity sheet and marks on it the slate number, the scene number, the number of takes made of that set-up, which takes were good and the exact timing, action and dialogue of each take. Exact continuity sheets are extremely important to have when editing the film. The continuity girl is often far more experienced than the director in the making of films and it is a wise director who listens to her advice on camera angles, eyelines, etc.

The lighting cameraman looks after only the lighting of the sets and actors; he usually does not operate a camera at all. The best lighting cameramen are fast, good in quality and economical in the use of lights. A great deal of time (the major amount) in shooting pictures is taken up in lighting the sets. A lighting cameraman who lights quickly and well is one of the greatest assets a picture can have. A producer must have a knowledge of different cameramen and how they work in order to help the director select the right one for a particular film. Very often a director may ask for a cameraman he has worked with before.

The camera operator is the person who actually sits behind the camera and shoots the film. The other members of the camera crew are the focus puller and the clapper-loader.

Q. How common is the use of more than one camera in the shooting of a picture?

A. This depends on the director, but if there are large crowd scenes it is cheaper to use two or three cameras to get

different shots and angles than to keep bringing the crowd back for more days. The same is true of fight scenes. The extra cameras and crews are only called in on the actual days they are needed. They are budgeted and planned for in advance.

The floor mixer, tape recorder operator and boom operator form the sound crew. The use of Nagra $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch tape recorders on the floor makes everything much more simple and cheaper now than the old way of recording on 35 mm. tape by running cables out to sound trucks. Also, the tape can be played back immediately to the director and actors if requested.

Q. Is there any way of shooting on TV tape and using it for the final print?

A. TV tape is very difficult to edit and is very expensive to make prints from. However, some special effects can be done much more easily by shooting on tape with TV cameras . . . and then transferring them to use as part of a picture.

Q. What is the quality like?

A. Very good, but not yet good enough for theatrical purposes, except in short shots. Very good for colour television. Technicolor is doing a great deal of work in this field and may soon come up with something that may totally revolutionize film making as we know it.

The editing staff comes on the picture from the first day of shooting, unless they are needed for something special beforehand, e.g. for a sequence on film that will be projected from the rear onto a TV screen during shooting, which

must be prepared in advance by the editor.

The editor and his crew stay on the picture until about one week after dubbing. The editing crew, to begin with, consists of the editor and first and second assistant editors. About three weeks before the end of shooting, a dubbing editor and assistant dubbing editor are added to the crew. The job of the dubbing editor is to take charge technically of all the dialogue tracks, to post-synchronize the artists when necessary, and to supervise all sound effects including footsteps, which are always especially recorded by footsteps specialists – there are such! – after the editing is completed. British films make far more use of sound effects than American films. The dubbing editor lays all the sound tracks for the dubbing – the mixing of all tracks – which is the final process in the making of a film, other than processes done at the lab. The wardrobe mistress or master and assistant are put on the picture about two weeks before shooting. They consult with the director and make a scene-by-scene breakdown of all the costumes needed. Most of the costumes are hired. Some stars provide their own clothes. Some actors have it written into their contracts that the production provides them with a complete wardrobe and they then buy it back from the production at the end of the picture at one third the cost. There is usually only one make-up artist on a picture, but on days when there is a large crowd, one or more assistants may be called in. The same applies to the hairdresser. This is all budgeted for in advance.

The casting director consults with the producer and director and calls in actors they may want to interview. Our own casting director interviews the artists in front of a Sony TV camera and then shows the TV recordings of the interview to us, thus saving us a great deal of time.

Q. How extensive is the use of this?

A. As far as I know, we are the only ones who do it.

Q. Are there many instances where the unions insist that the film company take crew members who are not needed?

A. No. I think this is a widely-believed fallacy in the film industry. The crew is called on a daily basis, except for those contracted for the entire shooting period. The production office knows what crew is needed for the following day's shooting and only those who are necessary are called. This false belief could have come about because of the limited use to which you can put particular members of the crew, e.g. a carpenter can only work as a carpenter, etc. In some countries a man may do any job called for, but he is usually less efficient at each of them than the specialists and, so, though a smaller crew may be used, the end result may be more expensive and time-consuming.

Q. Are there any rules about how many men must be used on, for example, the camera?

A. Yes. But you need the number of men the rules call for. If you tried to shoot with fewer, you would only waste time.

The union rule I do disagree with is that the calling of overtime is

not, in this country, the prerogative of the producer. The three film unions all have to confer before they decide whether they will allow you overtime, which must be asked for by about 2.30 of the day you need it . . . and a production never knows whether overtime will be agreed to or not. Sometimes you may not get it when you need it desperately to complete a sequence. Usually the union members are very co-operative in the matter of overtime, but you are never absolutely certain of getting it when you need it and I think it would be better if you could be.

The art department works closely with the producer and director and consists of a production designer, an art director, a draughtsman, a construction manager, a property buyer and a set dresser. These start work several weeks prior to production and stay until the end of shooting. On each picture there is an accountant and an assistant (on a large film there is often more than one assistant). One of the accountant's jobs is to give an estimated finishing cost, which changes somewhat each week as the production progresses. This way a check is kept on the costs so that you can see if you are going to go over budget in what categories . . . and perhaps do something about it before it is too late.

Q. Such as what?

A. Such as, in consultation with the director, cutting out scenes in the script. It is amazing what you can find is unnecessary when you have to. Very often it improves the picture.

Allowances have to be made in the

budget for an orchestra, composer; supplies from the studio stores, rental of props and wigs, for film and laboratory charges and for shooting and editing equipment.

Q. What happens to film which is not used?

A. You try to order all the film stock from one batch, but the total amount of film allowed for in the budget, while held for you, is not purchased all at once. It is ordered as it is needed and the short ends are used up. So there is usually no unused film left.

Q. What happens to the used film?

A. It is stored in vaults until the distribution company says it is no longer needed. Often it is used for spacing on sound tracks for a later film. Apart from that there isn't really anything you can do with it.

Q. Can the shot footage be used to make another film?

A. It is not at all likely that a distribution company would allow you to do this, but useful shots and sound effects are put into libraries and can be purchased for other films.

When shooting, particularly on low-budget films, very few takes are printed in colour because it is more expensive than printing in black and white. An allowance is made for this in the budget. Each distribution company issues to the production company a contract stating what the delivery requirements are: how many prints they want, how many sound tracks etc. The budget includes the cost of whatever is called for in the contract.

The producer negotiates with the studio the charge for the hire of the stages and other facilities.

The studio provides one camera. If the producer wants more or requires special equipment, it has to be hired. The studio also provides the sound equipment and a certain amount of lights. If additional lighting equipment is required, this too has to be hired. The producer also has to make an allowance in the budget for special effects, power consumption, location allowances, and travel and transport. When shooting a location picture an allowance has to be made for hotel and living expenses and travelling allowances. If an artist is brought over from abroad, the company has to pay for his air fare (most artists have it in their contracts that they are allowed two first class return air fares) and living expenses.

Q. Do you have to pay for a star's entourage?

A. This depends on who the star is and what is stated in his contract. Most stars don't have entourages.

Q. Do you have to pay for their families?

A. You usually have to pay for only two fares and a living allowance.

On each film, the producer has the major stars and the director covered by insurance as it can cost so much money if filming is stopped for any length of time, due to the illness of anyone important. Sometimes the schedule can be altered to work around the person who is away. Insurances also cover the physical film itself, expensive props and any accidents which might occur to any member of the crew while shooting.

Allowances also have to be made in the budget for a release script, which is used in preparing foreign

subtitled or dubbed versions of the film; Censor's fees; and Film Producers' Association subscription which has to be paid on every film made in England.

Q. How can someone get into the film union?

A. The best way is through the labs. They always need personnel. You can go and work there and after a while try to get a union ticket. Another way is by becoming a trainee at a TV station. To get a ticket to work in films directly is very difficult, almost impossible, at the moment.

Q. If someone came to you with a treatment for a story, would you advance them money to write a script?

A. Yes, if we liked the treatment enough.

Q. Who decides who the writer will be for a script?

A. The producer – if he finances the script himself – or the distribution company, together with the producer, if they finance the script. Sometimes the director suggests the writer.

Q. How much better is it for an author to submit a screenplay than a book?

A. It is better to submit a book, unless the screenplay is very good.

COMPLETION GUARANTEE

With most companies who finance films you must get a completion bond for the film. The most knowledgeable people in the film industry, I think, are Film Finances Limited who provide completion bonds. You go to them with your script, budget and

schedule – and tell them who your personnel are going to be. They know whom in the industry to trust, how fast and sensible different directors are, how fast and good lighting cameramen are, how much sets should cost, whether a shooting schedule is feasible, etc. They go through everything connected with the film and if you have an honest budget and schedule will guarantee, for a fee, to pay the costs if you go over budget. A completion bond insures the distribution company that is paying for the making of the film that they themselves will not have to spend more than the amount of the budget. The completion guarantee fee is part of the budget.

Q. Does Film Finances know such things as which actors and actresses are prone to illness?

A. I'm sure they do.

Q. Do they bring pressure to bear during the making of the picture?

A. No – not unless you start going way over budget . . . and then it is very little more than consultation as to what to do about it . . . and how to prevent the film from going over still more.

PRODUCTION

During production, a call sheet is issued at the end of each day. This informs everyone what will be shot the following day, who will be needed at what times and what special props will be required. If you are going out to a location, a movement order is also issued telling everyone how to get there and in which vehicles. The day after each day's shooting, the production secretary makes out

a progress report which is based on the information given on the camera and sound report sheets and the continuity sheets. The progress report shows what was shot the previous day, how much film and sound stock were used, what equipment was used, how many extras were called, whether you are ahead of or behind schedule, etc. A copy of this is sent to the producer, the accounts department, the distribution company and to Film Finances, so that everyone knows the exact position of the production, both physically and financially at all times.

Q. What does the producer do and what does the director do?

A. Nowadays the director has more and more authority. Once, a director was given a script and told to shoot it, but now the director has more control over the film. The producer is usually the person who finds the story, works with the writer on the screenplay, obtains the stars, chooses the director and gets the financing. The director participates in most of this, but chiefly he is responsible for casting and filming the picture and seeing that it is edited the way he would like it to be.

Q. Is TV a good way for directors to get into the film industry?

A. Yes, and it is a very good way of gaining experience. Most new directors come from TV.

Q. How many films do you make a year?

A. We try to make at least three a year. We could handle far more if we could get the financing.

Q. How do you choose which subjects to make into films?

A. We obtain advance proofs of any books which seem to have film possibilities. We have very wide tastes. It depends on what catches our imagination.

Q. Do directors come to you with ideas?

A. Sometimes. But mostly we find the stories by reading and reading and reading.

Q. How does a producer generally work with a director?

A. A producer discusses the picture a great deal with the director before shooting and they work together with the writer on the script and on the casting, but once the picture is on the floor it is more or less in the hands of the director and the only thing a producer can do is let him shoot the picture in his own way.

At the end of each day you see the previous day's rushes and you can discuss them with the director and perhaps suggest additional angles or coverage to give greater choice in editing, but you cannot tell a director how to make a film. Very rarely is a director fired from a picture. In most cases the director stays on the film until the first cut, after that he has no say in the picture contractually and the producer and distribution company can re-edit the film, but our directors usually stay with the film throughout the editing and until the picture is finished dubbing and the final film is usually what the director wants it to be.

EDITING

A film is very often made more in the cutting room than in the shooting. During the first week

of editing you very often have to change the order of scenes to find out how the film works best structurally. Often, the final film is very different from the script which was filmed. A good exercise to see what happens to a film creatively in shooting and editing is to compare the shooting scripts with the final release scripts of films. You can learn a tremendous amount from this . . . and there should be a library of shooting and release scripts available to students.

Q. Does it bother you when a film is changed drastically in the cutting room?

A. No, I think editing is one of the most creative parts of making a film. It can make a film work, where it may not have before.

Q. Are there many creative producers who like to get involved in the actual making of the film?

A. There are more and more producers who do not get involved in the making of the film at all, but merely put together the 'package' – script, director, stars – and obtain financing. They then turn over the making of the film to others.

Q. Is it easy for a producer to become a producer/director?

A. It is usually the other way around. If a company wants a particular director, he may ask to produce the film as well. This gives him a sort of split personality. A producer will usually try to make the best kind of film he can for the budget he has for it. The tendency of a director is to make the best kind of film he can, no matter the cost. It is

hard for one man to do both jobs and the results of producer/director films have not always been good, either financially or artistically.

Q. How many films in England make money?

A. I don't really know. We have made most of ours for fairly low budgets and most of them have been profitable. Films sometimes lose money on the production side but still make money for the distribution companies who finance them, because they make money on the distribution side and the total result is a profit.

Q. Would you need to sell a film abroad to get the money back?

A. That depends on the kind of film. *Till Death Us Do Part* made a profit in Great Britain alone. Again, it depends on the film. If you make an indigenous film and it is a good film, you have a world market for it. E.g., *If* happened to hit in the world market but it was an indigenous film. So was *Georgy Girl*.

Q. Does American financing destroy indigenous British films?

A. If you look at the British films that were made here recently (*Privilege*, *Up The Junction*, *Charlie Bubbles*, *If*) – all were financed by American companies. And what were the British companies making at the time? *Carry On* comedies. What you call an 'indigenous British film' has, in fact, mostly been financed by American companies.

Q. What is a production company's relationship with the Censor?

A. Prior to production, you send

the screenplay to John Trevelyan at the British Board of Film Censors and he sends you a letter telling you the things the Board might object to and cautioning you against certain things which might be treated in such a way that they would be censorable. The Censors really fight for good films and prevent scenes which are unnecessarily brutal and those which are put in merely to titillate audiences. When the Censors object to a scene, you try to find another way of making the same story point and usually it turns out far better artistically. The Film Censors have moved with the times. In its day *Room At The Top* was a very daring film and for the Censors to allow it to be shown was a great breakthrough. Today its sex scenes seem naïve, as the

Censors have moved with the times.

- Q. Once the British Board of Film Censors have passed a film can local authorities still ban it?
- A. Once they have passed it you are fairly safe, but local authorities are still able to ban a film. They very rarely do.
- Q. Do you find that the distributors are in touch with their audiences?
- A. Producers and distributors must not only be in touch with their audiences, but two years ahead of them, as it takes as long as that – or more – between the time the idea for a film is conceived and the finished film is released.

Milton Subotsky has written and co-produced twenty-three feature films, eighteen of them in Great Britain.

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JAMES CELLAN JONES and the classic serial

interviewed by
MARGARET TARRATT

James Cellan Jones is a television drama director, particularly associated with the BBC 'Classic Serial' series. Those he has directed include: *Esther Waters*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Scarlet and the Black*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 'a large chunk' of *The Forsyte Saga*, *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Way We Live Now*. He also directed the modern serial *An Enemy of the State*, Alun Richards's *Albinos in Black* and David Hopkins's *The Sinner*.

The Portrait of a Lady is to be repeated in January. At present, he is about to begin work on a thirteen-part adaptation of Sartre's *Les Chemins de La Liberté* which should be shown in the autumn of next year.

JCJ: All my family were doctors. I was born in Wales and I was supposed to go into medicine. I weak-mindedly allowed myself to be led into reading science and got a natural sciences degree at Cambridge. With great relief, I gave it all up and started work as a call boy at the BBC. I thought by this time I was too old to go into the theatre, which I should have done really. I quite liked the idea of acting but I always had an obsession to be a director. It was a great release to do something that I wanted if it was only being a call boy. This was extraordinarily good experience especially as they kept on saying: 'There's no possible chance of you ever becoming a director, you do realize that?' It's a good way to learn but it's not the ideal way because it takes too long. The advantage of starting at the bottom and working up very slowly is that you can learn things by a sort of osmosis rather than by committing them to memory and they seem to stick with the experience one gains through absorption. It seems more effortless than having to learn intensely and academically. It also seems much harder but there are awful disadvantages. You become terribly mechanically minded with your job because this tends to be mechanical for a long time anyway. When you do become a director you have got to work very hard to shrug this off.

Well, I progressed through all the stages like assistant floor manager, floor manager and production assistant and it was a matter of luck that I got to be a director. It was at the time we were doing *Lorna Doone* and someone suddenly remembered that a lot of it took place during the worst winter for 300 years, which was 1688. We found that we were in the worst winter since that time with snow everywhere. I was given a marvellous brief – an ideal brief for a young, pushing director. I was told to start from scratch and shoot fifteen minutes in the snow and

Margaret Tarratt has written and lectured on the Nineteenth Century Novel and is a member of the BFI Lecture Panel.

if it was any good, the scripting and casting would be done around it, which is, in fact, what happened. It was done at thirty-six hours notice, we used it all and some of it was quite successful. It was merely that I happened to be in the right place at the right time and got this job which led to the offer of a director's job later. *Lorna Doone* was one of the so-called Classic Serials. It's a dangerous generic title, I think, because they may or may not be classics, and they may or may not be suitable for dramatization. I seem to have worked mainly on adaptations of novels.

MT: Was this because of *Lorna Doone*?

JCJ: Well, I think I was offered the first one because of *Lorna Doone* but since then it's been a matter of chance because I've been able to choose my subjects. I certainly have chosen these adaptations of classics, partly, I think, because they give one a chance as a director for several reasons: one is that however creative the job may or may not be, as a director, one is basically interpreting. I find it more interesting, and more free in a way, interpreting a book, even though there's an intermediary of an adaptor. I sometimes feel constrained working on a modern play with a writer who is with me all the time, and is naturally anxious to affect the interpretation strongly.

MT: You don't come across this problem if you are working with an adaptor?

JCJ: You do to an extent but I get very didactic and say: 'well it's my version of Mr. Trollope or Mr. James, or whoever it is; it's lovely to work with you but really what I'm interpreting is Mr. James, not your adaptation'. On the other hand, you can have a marvellous relationship with an adaptor who feels the same way. It can be a very fruitful thing working together.

MT: How did you feel about working with Jack Pulman on *Portrait of a Lady*?

JCJ: He's a very forceful, strong character and he wrote a beautiful, rather personal adaptation. I already had prejudices in my own mind on my reading of the novel and we clashed head on when we first met. He didn't like my ideas of casting and we didn't agree at all but as we worked together, we developed a mutual respect, then a great understanding as we finished it. He was terribly rewarding to work with.

MT: What do you think are the aims and function of the classic serial? When I spoke to Christopher Fry (he adapted *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) he agreed with Douglas Allen and Constance Cox that the main concern is to bring the viewer back to the novel. How do you, as a director, feel about this?

JCJ: Oh, I disagree diametrically! I think the point is to make use of this wealth of marvellous, exciting material to make exciting television. If, as happens, you get a tremendous sale of the novel, it's a bonus but to my mind it's a purely secondary consideration.

MT: Is the Classic Serial a stylistically inhibiting framework to work within?

JCJ: No, I've never found it so. I find I get extremely inhibited and worried working in other frameworks in television. For example, the framework of a series with a running cast, which I find almost impossible to work and I avoid them as much as possible. Although in some play series, I've had entirely separate plays, each of which of course, is a play in itself, I've found inhibiting the expectation that one is supposed to do it in a particular style. The fortunate thing about the classics is that I always approach them entirely personally and I approach each one on its merits. I do not feel tied to any style at all. I think that there is great danger in an



Esther Waters: One of the lesser known novels adapted as a classic serial

appalling reverence and I hate the phrase 'Classic Serial' because it implies that these are works to which one should genuflect all the time. I think one should show deep respect for the spirit and none at all for the letter.

MT: The idea of what constitutes a classic seems to have been extended in the 'Classic Serial' series – *Sinister Street* for example – but you seem to have been associated with the more traditional classics. Is there any reason for this?

JCJ: Well, one of the first ones I did was *Esther Waters*. I knew a little bit about Moore because he was a relative of my mother's. I wouldn't call this a classic; I think it's a fascinating social document of its time and I think it's got excellent characters and a good, if slightly melodramatic, plot and is exciting to do. That was probably one of the most successful I did. Other than that, I seem to be stuck in the more respectable novels of the late nineteenth century which is a period I feel quite strongly drawn to.

I suppose I find the hypocrisy of the age fascinating, and the tight, hedged-in surface morality against the appalling poverty and degradation under the surface. I found myself doing Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* because I worked earlier on *The Ambassadors*. I worked with Denis Constanduras who had a very faithful ear for Jamesian dialogue and that's when my interest in Henry James awakened. I found myself saying with H. G. Wells that perhaps James was a hippopotamus picking up a pea, and that he turned his back on the greatest experience of the Nineteenth century to report on the tittle-tattle of the tea tables of Europe, and I had a little crisis of nerves about it when I started. When I got into it, I immediately accepted the characters as characters, not in their own particular closed-in environment and I didn't find myself feeling that one ought to be aware of the social problems of the day because one was concerning oneself with detailed personal, emotional problems.

MT: Do you read much literary criticism on the classics you direct?

JCJ: Yes, a great deal. I read as much as I can and I do a lot of non-specific research about period. I find *Punch* a tremendous help not so much for specific detail, although of course one does use it for details of costume, but for soaking oneself in the events of the day. I also try and do research into music of the time, again not necessarily for specific reasons but just to get the feel of the musical taste of the period. Sometimes I use the music of a period and sometimes I go way off period if I think it works better.

MT: You tend to use titles with a 'period' flavour, don't you?

JCJ: One of the reasons I hate so much doing one episode of a series instead of my own sort of total show, is that I think that the building up of the packaging, which is what the titles are, must reflect the whole. It needs thought over a long period, before one decides on the style of packaging and one gets great fun out of it too.

MT: Did you use a 'period' opening ironically in *Portrait of a Lady* and *The Way We Live Now*?

JCJ: Definitely in *The Way We Live Now*. I treated it as a sort of Victorian peepshow and we started off by looking through *Punch* where I found the characters very crude and slightly overdrawn. Trollope's novel was very black and white which was deliberate, I think, and I thought of his characters almost in *Punch* cartoon terms. We made what, in fact, looked like a little penny peepshow for the opening and closing and I found some music to go with it, which was a recording of an old symphonium. We even kept the penny going in the slot at the beginning but I don't know if people realized that's what it actually was. I used a device, which was, at the beginning of each part, to have a black and white drawing of the character, which so far as I was concerned was a statement of my own, and then to dissolve through to an identical representation of the person in colour, and firmly to come away at the end from an object in colour crudely and harshly into a black and white object.

MT: How much do you work primarily with colour transmission in mind?

JCJ: It's positively at the back of my mind that most of the audience is watching the programme in black and white and I wonder whether I should sacrifice the colour, although colour, to me, has opened up a whole new dimension in television. It's different, I think, from the situation that happened in film when one was at the mercy of variable and often inferior film stock. Since the television director



The chiaroscuro effect in *The Way We Live Now* contributes to the 'black and white' characterization

has far greater control over the use of colour it's made it wildly exciting and infinitely more difficult because you can make statements in colour which can say far more than if you had done a great deal of visual gymnastics in black and white; on the other hand, you have to keep an eye on the black and white all the time, to make sure that it isn't completely being missed by most of the viewers.

One of the things that has changed considerably in the BBC over the past two years has been the increasing importance of costume design. There are a lot of young clever designers who are a joy to work with and very stimulating. Previously, it tended to be very much a secondary thing: colour of course, has had a lot to do with this. For the same reason, set design is also becoming more interesting.

MT: How much does the budget vary from serial to serial? Is it in proportion to the amount of advance publicity it receives?

JCJ: No, I don't think it is. Although we imported foreign actors for *Portrait of a Lady*, in fact, it was cheaper than *The Way We Live Now* by quite a large sum of money. I think it was the fact that we were buying a well known person rather than that of the money that was spent which dictated the amount of publicity for *Portrait of a Lady*. *The Way We Live Now* had forty-seven speaking parts and *Portrait of a Lady* had eighteen and it's actors that cost money, as is very proper. This is where the bulk of it always goes and I'm delighted that it should.

MT: What about the number of episodes involved, who decides that?

JCJ: Well, that is basically decided by the producer who commissions the script. When we did *The Ambassadors* it was first thought that it should be in four episodes; some people at the time thought that this was too short. Michael Voysey, who was the script editor, Denis Constanduras and I talked about it at some length and Denis found that the natural number as far as he was concerned, was three which seems ridiculously small but, in fact, seemed to fit without any compression at all, and that seemed to work perfectly. At great cost to schedule and to administration

of all sorts, Douglas Allen changed the number to three and we did it in three. I felt that *The Way We Live Now* should have been in six, so did Simon Raven. I didn't say that before we did it but on reflection, I think it should have been six.

MT: Can you say something about the amount of rehearsal time you have?

JCJ: It's never long enough but it never will be long enough, however long you make it. We work in a very peculiar way on these classics; it's a unique way, I think, and can be very valuable. It was worked out when I was working with Douglas Allen a long time ago, and the idea is that one does a certain amount of work on all episodes before ever committing oneself to posterity on the first one. It's terribly valuable to the actor because it gives him a rounded feel of the part before he ever has to commit himself with any of it. In fact, we rehearsed each episode for three days on *The Way We Live Now*. Then we concentrated a lot on each episode for a week and then recorded it. I felt that was slightly under-rehearsed: we had seven full days of rehearsal and two days in the studio for each episode. Ideally, one wants a total period of a fortnight including the studio days and time off. Time off is terribly important, I suppose because of the opportunity to sleep on the thing before one puts it again to the test. You can find no way of expressing the scene and then approach it in the morning, and all of a sudden, it works.

MT: Do you know much about the composition of your audience for classic serials? Are they mainly middle aged?

JCJ: I think they are. A lot of them are women. There's a tremendous following among dons. I was at Oxford the other day at a college dinner and found myself surrounded by fans! I think one can occasionally break out of the faithful group; we did with *Esther Waters* and I think we did with *Portrait of a Lady*. We had a sneak preview on *The Way We Live Now*, which I did in a peculiar stylized way, and it produced the most interesting reaction. Some people it made very angry indeed; they thought the acting was amateur and they weren't interested in the period or the story. This was very frightening to see. I don't know how rational these were but they certainly worried me at the time. In fact, *The Way We Live Now* did reasonably successfully and got very good notices.

MT: But they weren't necessarily the people who felt that you were not giving them the representation of their favourite characters that they wanted?

JCJ: Oh no, it wasn't that at all, and one very rarely gets that. I think the biggest danger is Dickens where you have a strongly established Dickens Society all of whom have very deep and precise feelings about a character they have built up in their minds; they can be shocked and outraged if he is not portrayed according to their prejudices, which is very understandable. But I think the 'faithful' audience usually do know a book and are intelligent enough to admit variations in character with personal impressions.

MT: Is there much pressure to use the studio as much as possible in the Classic Serials?

JCJ: Rather than film? Yes, I'm ambivalent about it. I love using film but I get worried occasionally about mixing the media – I shouldn't call it media in fact, because one's making pictures whichever mechanical way one is using – but I find one gets different styles of lighting and different styles of camera work. You may have the same director, but these factors can't help being affected by the people



Colin Blakely as a stereotype nineteenth-century Jewish financier in *The Way We Live Now*

you are working with, who are, after all, artists. In *Portrait of a Lady* I only used one film sequence. It was possible to match the styles but the difficulty there was that it is a very complicated book. We rehearsed for a very, very long time and dug deep into it before we actually committed anything to posterity. Film acting is a different technique in that it comes straight off the top of the head and can be magic as a result, but it's approached in a different way. I was very aware of the difference in performance between the filmed and the rehearsed sequences.

MT: Do you feel that the Italian episodes in *Portrait of a Lady* were less successful than the Gardencourt sequences?

JCJ: I agree. We were hampered a little bit by lack of room; one's pressing a lot into a television studio in terms of size. Ideally, we would have rehearsed it in the television way in detail, found the right location and gone and shot it in Italy rather than doing it in the classic film way.

MT: Would you agree that in spite of this, *Portrait of a Lady* is your most successful serial to date?

JCJ: Yes. I went through absolute agony about that because I wanted to establish a style of incredibly leisurely relaxed tempo and I imposed this rather arbitrarily on the actors. It went a little bit against their instinct to play the English tea-party so slow and leisurely but I think it was right in the end.

MT: Was it your idea to cast Richard Chamberlain as Ralph Touchett?

JCJ: Yes. One or two people objected very strongly to the idea. I heard he was in the country and I thought I'd meet him and talk about it anyway, and I had lunch with him. During the period between when I asked him and when I lunched with him, which was twenty-four hours, he'd read the book (or two thirds of it) and talked very intelligently about it. I got wildly enthusiastic and from then on, nobody

else would do in that part for me. I offered him the part over lunch and rushed back to get the money from the BBC who were very good and wrote me up at once and gave it to me. I don't think he would think the money he got was very much, but he was considerably more expensive than we had budgeted for.

MT: Richard Chamberlain said in a television interview that he saw Ralph Touchett as the villain of the book. Was this his idea or yours?

JCJ: I don't see it like that at all! I don't know when he said that. They're all romantics for a start, in *Portrait of a Lady* but he, although a romantic, is the one clear-eyed person who can see through the romantic mists and this is caused by the certain knowledge of his imminent death. He's had to sort out his life and think clearly and he's the one person who sees. The rest are all surrounded in a great miasma of romanticism.

MT: What about *The Forsyte Saga*?

JCJ: That was quite exciting to do. I'm not very good, as I said, at working in conjunction with a lot of other people on a series in a sort of group effort. I'm much better on my own, but I was helped by the fact that my part of it started after a twenty-year gap with a lot of new characters. We did some very exciting filming and in my mind it's some of the best I've ever done. I can take most of *The Forsyte Saga* but I really shy at Galsworthy when he gets on to the aristocracy. He seems to be altogether too humble an admirer of them. *A Modern Comedy* has never had the success of the early ones and I think this is most of the reason.

MT: Why was *The Forsyte Saga* not directed by one man?

JCJ: It would have been the right way to do it I think but 26 one-hour pieces is a little bit too big unless one is well ahead with all the preparation, and we weren't. The scripts were very behind. I think one person could have done it if more preparation had been done in advance.

MT: Did you consult with David Giles about the style?

JCJ: We had to compromise. I felt that we could afford an abrupt change of style after the twenty-year gap and I insisted on using my own ideas. With other things one had to compromise a lot. The producer and two directors did the casting and each person had a veto, so nobody could or would have to work with somebody he actively disliked and despised. However, one had to compromise on a lot of one's ideas.

MT: What kind of ideas?

JCJ: Well, casting for a start. The other director might not have liked some of the people I'd cast and vice versa. Design: one can always refurbish a set after the passage of time and thus fit in with the style of the two different directors but one can't really change the ground plan; that has to remain constant. Character: I might have a diametrically opposed view to the other director on a character. Say he was establishing a character and I was taking him or her up later on: I might have the most definite ideas about how he should have prepared that character for what I considered selfishly, was the important bit – i.e. when she was working with me! I found that very difficult. It happened many times. I've got a great respect for David Giles and I hope he has for me but obviously, our ideas are different.

MY: How much has the success of *The Forsyte Saga* affected your career? Has your price gone up with it?



Portrait of a Lady is remarkable for its attention to detail

JCJ: Yes, it has. It's nice to meet people from Australia who have seen one's work and of course, they all get it there. I hear *Esther Waters* has just been shown for the fifth time in Australia. I met a Yugoslavian lady who grasped me by the hand and praised *The Forsyte Saga*. I said 'Oh I've done something much better than that called *Portrait of a Lady*' and she said 'Where can I buy it?' and went off and bought it at once.

MT: How do you feel about repeats of serials?

JCJ: Well, we don't get any money for them! This is a great bone of contention. It's only because directors are such appalling cowards and they won't get together. They are all incredibly jealous of each other and spiteful. Actors have joined together with marvellous cooperation in Equity and they seem to have established a trade union which is a hard, tough bargainer and one doesn't lose sight of what they are all after and what they are trying to do. Directors belong to ACTT which is a good strong union but it doesn't really represent what directors are after because they are rather specific people. I don't know what the answer is. We are basically all selfish and self-absorbed and spiteful and it would be very difficult to get us all together.

MT: But do you welcome a repeat at all, or not?

JCJ: We do occasionally, but it does pose a very difficult problem. For example, *Enemy of the State* which I did five years ago is now coming out again; I find this

slightly worrying in that I did it in a peculiar jerky style which I felt at the time was suitable to the play. I wonder how fast it will date, because it won't be presented as an interesting piece from five years ago. It'll just be presented as a new thing. I think, on the whole, as long as the repeats don't take too much work away from people (which they *do*) they are valuable because there's nothing so frightening in the world as ringing up and asking about the tape or film of a show you've done and being told cheerfully by someone 'Oh, that's been junked.' I know it's an ephemeral medium but it's absolute agony to know that something which you break your heart doing has been thrown away.

MT: Has it happened to you?

JCJ: Well, yes. Actually it happened with *Enemy of the State* and what they show is a grotty 16 mm. copy dragged out from somewhere. And I broke my heart playing with the grading of the film copy and getting the right lighting!

MT: Would you say something about the producer's role in all this? Is it a purely executive kind of role?

JCJ: I was brought up in television where there was a person called a producer who was given some money and told to serve something up on a certain date. The BBC at one time was unique in that no pressure of any sort was brought to bear on the person who did this and it was a marvellous way of working. For better or for worse, they've got a producer system now and a producer is useful occasionally as a fresh pair of eyes. You may have been working so closely with a thing you miss something which is very obvious. Someone who approaches it with a fresh viewpoint can immediately see and point it out and that's when I find one useful. I think producers are, in fact, purely administrators. It's disastrous to have producers who are frustrated directors, I think. In fact, they're *entrepreneurs* but *entrepreneurs* can be creative and can inspire and excite a director on some occasions. I've got, I suppose, a reputation for being slightly awkward and wishing to always have my own way and I usually get it.

MT: Where does the clash come? Is it over casting?

JCJ: Sometimes over casting. I've done a lot of work with David Conroy who is very good to work with. He will always be honest and say what he thinks and is therefore very valuable as a source of opinion and one knows that he won't give out direct orders. For example, if I want to cast someone he may say, 'I think he's disaster but it's entirely up to you'. This is much more effective than attempting to forbid me because my immediate reaction is going to be to go on and book him at once; but I find I have a great respect in particular for David Conroy's opinion.

MT: What is your attitude to actors? Do you feel they are basically puppets whose performance is manipulated by the director?

JCJ: No, I don't feel that. The relationship between a director and an actor, if things are working right, ideally comes to more than the sum of the parts. I think if things are working right between us something will come out which neither of us knew about. You can strike off sparks with one another which do make both of you work better than either of you knew was possible. I've got a great respect for actors. In the various schools of television and film production, which are coming up, this is one of the things which is desperately under-rated. Actors are very much thought of as puppets. Now they are very sanguine and sensible people and

if they're treated as puppets, they're mostly good craftsmen and they'll give a very good puppet performance. It doesn't last for long anyway and it's bearable. Then they'll go away and extend themselves somewhere else. Ideally you need to be what Reinhardt called the communicator of an enthusiasm, as a director, and produce an environment in which you can all extend yourselves. You also need to produce a company which is difficult in television. In television plays, you very often get a collection of individual performances, you very rarely get ensemble acting. These serials are one of the very few things where we can get that, because they are all together for perhaps three months, and you get a company happening and people identifying with the company as a family and marvellous things coming out of it. I went back into the theatre which was incredibly stimulating last year and did a production of *St. Joan* at Birmingham Rep. with a very exciting group of young actors. It was a vintage year and they've all gone on to marvellously successful things. It was extremely useful to a television director to get out and see young actors where they are being nurtured instead of sitting about in London waiting for them to come to you.

MT: Do you work freelance from choice?

JCJ: Oh yes, very much from choice. I was under contract for many years and try as they would, the BBC had to use me economically. Every now and then I found myself doing something I didn't like and it was absolutely necessary. It's no use employing someone for fifty-two weeks of the year if he's not going to be used economically and I went freelance, where in fact, ¹ I can get much more money. Now each job I do is separately negotiable and much more satisfactory all round.

MT: Have you been much affected by the new budgeting system?

JCJ: Not yet. I think it will affect me later. It's sensible. One's living a little in cloud-cuckoo-land under the old system where one writes off so many thousands of pounds as being below the line. The BBC has always been more liberal about money than anybody else. This induces in directors a desire not to overspend for the sake of overspending. If you know you're not going to be savagely set upon,



Godard-type composition in *The Forsyte Saga*

you develop your own sense of responsibility. You can overspend; you try very hard not to but if you do and the thing's a success you won't be blamed. When all is said and done, although you've got producers and all the mechanics of Hollywood it's still a very liberal organization. I'm a freelance and, in fact, I've only worked for the BBC from choice. I mean, the time may come when I'm ages out of work. . . .

MT: Would you like to work in the cinema at all?

JCJ: Yes, very much. Until now it's been a very difficult bridge for a director to cross for all sorts of historical reasons because of television taking the bread out of the mouths of people working in the cinema, the pace of work and the method of working. Now, I think for the first time a lot of television directors are beginning to work in the cinema. I'd love to. I'm indulging in various tentative negotiations and I'm looking for a modern novel to adapt. It's very dangerous to become identified with classic serials and one can tend to get rather stuck. In fact, I've done quite a lot of other work and none of it has been so successful.

I find Lindsay Anderson's work in the cinema fascinating. Occasionally I find his work so exciting that I want to do nothing else but imitate him and at another time, I react violently against him. *If* was full of peaks either way and one moment I would say 'How absolutely sublime' and at others I'd be hating it.

The danger of television, I think, is that the emotions you arouse can end up at a very low level because this is the machine that's always in one's house, and it's only the telly and there's no need to cry or laugh or get excited because it *is* only the telly. You can have a structure of emotion arising out of a show which is absolutely right but you find that all the peaks get cut off and all the troughs are filled in.

I'd like to expand my technique of working in film. I've done an awful lot of sequence filming for television with very often slightly inadequate facilities and slightly undertrained people. Although there are one or two marvellous technicians I can find to work with, you are always a little bit aware that you are being set on by the technique instead of using it joyfully. I feel that in films one would have a chance to expand because it is a different technique and I'm always at a loss to know, as I said, whether in fact it's a different medium. I think probably it's a different medium only in the way it's shown and the fact that one is to 500 people and one is to three and a half people in my house.

May 22nd, 1969



An exchange of prisoners at the Berlin Wall in *An Enemy of the State*, filmed at Paddington Dust-cart Depot

16mm Film Availability

by SUSAN MACDONALD

A film may be screened several times, in several versions, and, possibly, not one of these will be the version that left the cutting room to be sold to a distributor. There are a number of ways in which changes occur: by cutting, by making 16 mm. prints in black and white, not colour, by making 16 mm. prints in standard gauge, not cinemascope, by dubbing. All these changes need the permission of the distributor and the producer, who, in the case of the larger companies, rarely refuse. Thus, the industry can be said to sacrifice its own products. I propose to trace the various processes a film passes through once it is ready for release, and to show how these anomalies can occur. After that I shall examine the role of the BFI, CBA (Central Booking Agency), BFFS (British Federation of Film Societies) and NFT in fostering interest in film as an art form.

Films are normally sold to distributors on a seven year lease. Few film companies act as their own distributors since the Monopolies Commission Report. Certain categories of film from large companies go out through specific channels: until the new MCA library started, Rank handled Universal films, for example. But foreign and independent films go to anyone who can afford them. Only the owner of the Curzon Cinema was prepared to pay the high price for Buñuel's *Belle de Jour*; no-one will buy *Battle of*

Algiers as the price is too high; Godard's *One Plus One* was refused a censor's certificate on account of the four-letter words it contains – as this ensures that the commercial cinema chains won't show it, its only hope is an independent distributor, but it remains unbought. Thus some films never reach the general public, though they may receive screenings at the NFTs, or the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Films can be submitted to the censor before or after the rights are acquired. A censor's certificate might be seen as a precondition of commercial screenings, for the big circuits will not show a film without a certificate. This is not a *legal* necessity, but one insisted on by the film industry. The British Board of Film Censors is a private body, financed by the film trade in order to protect itself from charges of obscenity, etc. Therefore, none of the censor cuts are compulsory, but few distributors and producers proceed in violation of its decisions.

Censor cuts are the first way in which a film may be altered. The next possibility is that local authorities may make cuts, or, more rarely, reinstate cut sequences. A film usually has a long run in the West End before being let out for weekly circuit bookings. If the censor has refused a certificate, the Local Authority concerned can issue one, as the GLC did in the case of *Ulysses*. The GLC tends to be more

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lenient than most local authorities, and controversial films can be drastically pruned as they wind their way through the country. Once a film has been released on circuit, it follows a fairly standard system of screenings. After weekly circuit bookings, it is available for three-day bookings, it is then rested, released for one-day bookings, then rested for two years or so, before becoming available again. When the prints are finally returned, some will be destroyed; others may be cut and sent out as second features; others are kept for use abroad. Films sent to Ireland will be cut almost automatically, and films sent on from there to Malta will be further cut, rendering the prints quite unusable anywhere else.

Thus, during the seven-year lease period, the same film may appear in several guises, with various shots missing, and even with some reinstated in the wrong place. The ultimate responsibility for this sort of mutilation rests with the distributor and the producer. Some refuse to have their products tampered with, but others, mainly the larger companies, are obsessed by financial considerations, the need to sacrifice their product for their profits. When an artist paints a picture, he does not expect some zealous moralist to paint out the bits that people 'shouldn't see'; nor does he expect gallery officials to cut off bits until it is small enough to fit the rest of the exhibits. If it is considered unsuitable, it won't be exhibited. But it certainly won't be altered. Yet the film industry, by its lack of concern, seems to suggest that film is an inferior art, distinguished only by its entertainment potential.

This latter factor equals its financial potential and, therefore, permits people with no artistic pretensions, but obsessional ideas about drugs, sex, violence, or money, to destroy the unity, indeed, the whole look of a work.

There are other ways in which a film may be changed, but, save for TV screenings, these are relevant to the manufacture of 16 mm. prints. 16 mm. prints may vary in colour, sound, cuts and presentation from the 35 mm. version. They may also vary in availability. It should be realized that the availability of a film depends solely on what rights are held, not on whether a print happens to be in existence. When the commercial rights on 35 mm. prints expire, they can either be renewed by the same or a different distributor, or not. If not, they revert to the producer, who destroys the prints, maybe keeping one copy, and the film remains unavailable to commercial cinemas until some distributor renews the rights and prints it again.

Non-commercial rights are entirely separate. Often a distributor will buy both, but this is not an automatic procedure. Also the 35 mm. prints may be available non-commercially when the commercial rights have expired; or they may never be bought for non-commercial screenings. The condition of a 35 mm. print for non-commercial use depends entirely on which print is obtained, for these will be the same prints that have either travelled round the circuits, or were originally bought by a film library. The latter will almost certainly be the most complete version available.

However, 16 mm. prints are quite

a different commodity. Large companies print up in 16 mm. mainly for the profit they make from shipping and air lines, which need a continuous supply of films. Distributors may print forty to fifty copies for this purpose. When the ships have finished with them, they are available non-commercially, as long as the rights are held. The chances are that a film with a shipping contract will be identical on 16 mm. and 35 mm., but oddities do occur. As the same negative with cuts, dubbing or subtitles, etc., will be used, the most likely difference will be a black and white print instead of colour. The normal reason for printing in black and white is the comparative cheapness, but this doesn't apply to companies with large shipping orders. The reasons for printing *Bonnie and Clyde* in black and white provide a further insight into the haphazard workings of the industry. As most commercial films are made in colour, it is not surprising that film-addicted passengers want a change. Accordingly, the shipping lines asked the distributors for a selection of black and white prints. They arbitrarily chose *Bonnie and Clyde* as one of the victims. Some films that don't get shipping contracts may never become available in 16 mm. *Privilege* and *Fahrenheit 451* were only in 35 mm. for this reason until the MCA Library came into being. Others are printed up in black and white, as the distributor realizes that there is a non-commercial demand, but doesn't want the expense of printing in colour. At least twenty to thirty colour prints have to be ordered to make the venture financially viable, and shipping contracts represent the only source for such quantities.

Small distributors, like Contemporary Films Ltd., who tend to care more for their products, will go to great expense to print worthwhile films in colour.

A 16 mm. print may be complete when the 35 mm. print is not. Arthur Penn's *The Left Handed Gun* and Luis Buñuel's *Journal d'une Femme de Chambre* are examples of this, cut for commercial distribution in 35 mm. but not in the sub-standard gauge. This occurs when the censor's cuts in the negative are reinstated before printing, or when an uncut negative is obtained from another source. In the USA, for example, films are banned outright, never cut. Prints made from US film may also be dubbed, though the 35 mm. version might have sub-titles in this country; for Americans prefer dubbing. 16 mm. prints are usually printed in standard and cinemascope versions, where the original was cinemascope. Cinemascope films are, of course, more difficult to show, needing extra lenses for projection.

Apart from commercial and non-commercial rights, a film has television rights. Contrary to general opinion, television screenings cannot affect the availability of a film. A television company buys the exclusive television rights for a period of five to seven years, with a permitted maximum of three screenings. Sometimes only one screening is allowed. Television has no interest in whatever other rights are held, as these will have a negligible affect on their audiences. However, there is an inverse connection. Film companies will not sell the television rights of anything they regard as a viable box-office draw,

however old it is. Thus the Garbo films are not available to television.

The BBC is probably the only television company in the world that respects the films it handles. It has only ever shown three cut films, which it censored slightly for violence. It takes great trouble to obtain whole prints, sometimes going to the US for them. As the censor's cuts are not compulsory by law, the BBC can screen what it pleases, though a system of internal censorship eliminates really controversial exhibits and, therefore, safeguards it from possible prosecution.

ITV, on the other hand, is notoriously ruthless with prints. New prints are issued for television screenings, as quality is very important for reproduction purposes. But, whereas it takes about 700 ordinary screenings to wear a print out, ITV has been known to render a film unusable after one trip round its nine stations. They have no compunction about cutting a film to fit in with the advertisements and with the time allowance. Some of these cuts make little sense; some are reinstated in the wrong place by other channels. A notorious example of their skill was screened by their northern station: *Calamity Jane* with all the musical numbers removed.

In the USA, Preminger and George Stevens have taken television companies to court for mutilating their films, but these are unusual moves. Most companies appear not to care.

In this country, the responsibility of promoting film as an art form lies mainly with the BFI, and its associations that work closely with it. For this work, it receives an

annual government grant of £250,000, of which £80,000 is allotted to the NFA (National Film Archive) and £500 to the NFT. This large discrepancy indicates the relative value that the government places on the BFI's functions. The role of the NFA is to obtain copies of films and telerecordings of historical interest or artistic merit. However, from the practical point of view, this collection is taboo, for the NFA only loans prints if it has two copies. Thus its role is to preserve films for posterity, not to screen them. The NFT is the organ for screenings, but its meagre grant ensures that its programmes contain a large bread-and-butter element, in order to cover costs by audience takings. It is worth noting that the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, receives an annual grant of £1 million.

The NFT's programme of films is potentially unlimited. When a film is unavailable to all other places, it can still be shown at the NFT. Booking films for the NFT is one of the main functions of the CBA (Central Booking Agency) which is a department of the BFI. They have to know the potential source of prints for every film that has been made, and the procedure for clearing the copyright on films withdrawn from distribution. This is often a long and expensive process. David Meeker, who is in charge of the CBA, cited the example of obtaining *Pygmalion*. There was no trouble in getting a print, for the BFI had one, but clearing the rights took two months. Permission had to be obtained from the solicitors who handle Shaw's estate, from Warner Brothers-Seven Arts, who hold the rights of

My Fair Lady, and from the NBC (National Broadcasting Company) in New York, who held certain rights that were difficult to clear.

These complications are not atypical. During 1968, the CBA booked 800 films for the NFT from all parts of the world. Although this is a small percentage of their total bookings – 20,000 – the time taken and the money spent far exceeded that for all the rest. The NFA is only able to play a small role in providing prints for the NFT, owing to its restrictions on loaning prints. It provided 3 per cent of the 1968 programme.

The NFT usually screens the most complete prints available, even though this may mean getting them from abroad. The CBA aims to procure the best possible prints for NFT screenings, and can claim to know more about the condition of more prints than any other institution.

Apart from the more enlightened commercial cinemas, the main focus on film as art is to be found among film societies. Here the British Federation of Film Societies plays a vital role as the body that registers film societies. Prospective film societies submit a constitution modelled on a specimen available from the BFFS. This constitution has been drafted in accordance with the rules and regulations of screening films non-commercially. It is recognized by the CEA (Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association) and the AIC (Association of Independent Cinemas) who safeguard the interests of commercial exhibitors, and the KRS (Kinematograph Renter's Society) who represent the major distributors. The British

Film Institute has a Film Society Liaison Officer who acts as the paid Secretary of BFFS and has a permanent office on BFI premises. The BFFS services its member organizations by answering individual queries and through its monthly newsletter. It looks into complaints about its members that may arise from the trade bodies or local authorities. If the complaints are unjustified the BFFS gives its members full protection.

The prime aim of a film society is to encourage an interest in the art of cinema. Provided its programmes fulfil this aim a film society is not restricted in any way in the material it wishes to screen. There is a trade ruling that films may not be screened within two miles of a commercial cinema by a non-commercial exhibitor but with certain exceptions. One exception is a bona-fide film society registered with the BFFS.

Unfortunately one or two commercial organizations under the guise of 'a film society' have attempted recently to hire entertainment films for screening at reduced rates for private profit. To ensure that the film society movement is not used in this way registered members of the BFFS are now annually asked to let the Federation office in London have a record of their film programmes. This provides the Federation with information as added protection for its members in case of any possible complaint.

Distributors that are not members of KRS (Contemporary, Connoisseur, etc.) still hire films to non-commercial exhibitors on contracts that are almost identical with those issued by KRS members. As these other companies

tend to handle more foreign and less commercial films than KRS distributors, the availability of these films tends to be earlier for film societies due to the very few commercial screenings they normally have.

Any film society would be well advised to join the CBA and BFFS, all of which offer useful advice and help in various areas. They work closely together, though each has a distinctive role to play. The CBA operates a film booking service and other services related to programme planning. It has an important function as the negotiator with film renters in hiring rates, film availability and contractual obligations. It is backed by the resources of the BFI Information Department, Book and Stills libraries. Each distributor issues a catalogue, and there are about fifty catalogues for societies to choose from but the most comprehensive catalogue is issued by the CBA and entitled *Films on Offer*. Compiled by David Meeker, it is a selection of all the films he considers worth seeing, plus those that are in demand from societies: 'They are, however, only a selection from the many thousands of titles available for booking from numerous sources in this country and the Agency will always advise on the availability of films which are not included. It is important to remember, that, with a few special exceptions, it excludes details of the many films available from the BFI Distribution Library as these are listed in a separate catalogue published by the Institute.'

As the CBA is well-informed on the availability and condition of so many prints, member societies are unlikely to be faced with the

embarrassment of receiving a cinemascope print when they can only show standard, or of circulating details of a colour film that turns out to be in black and white, and so forth.

The CBA also plays a role in advising the smaller distributors on the likely demand for films, even putting pressure on them to make certain films available. The larger distributors tend not to consult the CBA, though it was recently asked for its advice on the reissue of a number of rare Warner Brothers' films. The profits they make from film societies, etc., are small compared to their commercial takings and their decisions to make available or to withdraw prints are not dependent on pleasing a minority group.

Both the CBA and the BFI have their own collection of prints that are available to members. The BFI Film Distribution Library contains nearly 2,000 films, while the CBA has a much smaller but, nevertheless, interesting collection. The largest collection is, of course, housed in the NFA, but it can only loan a small percentage of its prints. The author is grateful to Mr. David Meeker of the CBA who provided much of the information on which this article is based.

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3. *Films on Offer, 1968*, published by the CBA.



BRITAIN'S SOCIAL CINEMA

by Vicki Eves

The treatment of contemporary experience is comparatively rare in the British Cinema, particularly in the area of the feature film. It is possible, though, to see a development running through British films since the thirties of attempts at social realism, the biggest breakthrough being in the late fifties with the 'Free Cinema' movement. Social realism in the early British Cinema is generally attributed to the school of documentary film making; John Grierson—a major figure in this movement—had as his explicit aim 'the creative treatment of actuality'. He says of the British documentary movement that it:

'began not so much in affection for film *per se* as in affection for national education' that 'its origins certainly lay in sociological rather than in aesthetic aims'.¹

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Karel Reisz's *We Are the Lambeth Boys*

These sociological aims were realized in the hundreds of films made by Grierson and the other documentary film makers (such men as Basil Wright, Stuart Legg, Paul Rotha and Edgar Anstey), at the GPO film unit in the decade before the Second World War.

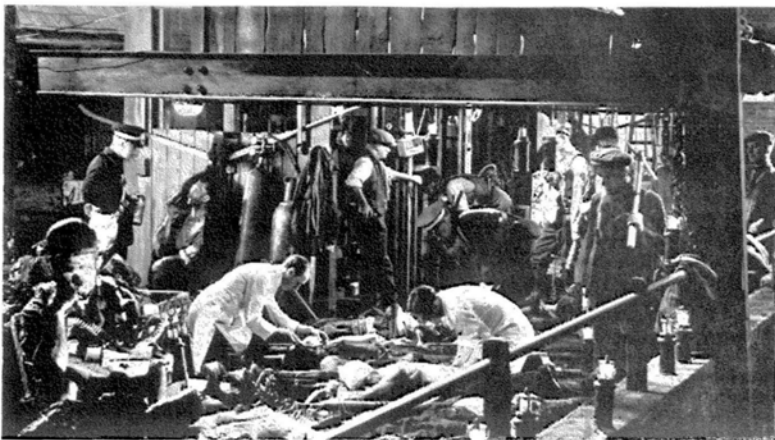
One can call these films sociological in that they dealt with the contemporary aspects of the housing shortage (for example, *Housing Problems*: Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton 1935), employment, industry, health and education. They would be more adequately described, though, as propaganda which is what is indeed implied by Grierson's phrase 'national education'.

Edgar Anstey, writing in 1950, about the way in which the regional life of Britain was depicted in films, defined the propaganda film as one that dealt with 'industrial life', in other words the documentary. The 'entertainment' film, on the other hand, depicted the domestic life of the people. Only a few films, he suggests, have attempted to 'bridge the gulf' – films such as *Millions Like Us* (1943) and *Chance Of A Lifetime* (1950).² These films bridged a gulf wider than that which existed between the portrayal of the industrial and domestic on the screen. They linked social comment and a form of social realism with the aesthetic and fictional quality of the feature film. What they lacked, and what was not to emerge until the period of 'Free Cinema', was an awareness of class antagonism and an absence of caricature. The emphasis in *Millions Like Us* (Sidney Gilliat) and the other comparatively few films making some form of social comment in the forties and early fifties, was on national character, underplaying the divisive factor of class. For example, in *Millions Like Us*, the only time in which the class issue arises is in the treatment of the factory girls' relationships at work. The story centres round a family in war time England. The accent in the film is on the romance of the youngest daughter and a pilot she meets in the factory where she works, on the family's 'simple joys'* and on the social life of the girls in the factory – for example, the canteen dances and mealtime concerts. Class conflict never really becomes manifest in the banter which goes on between the factory women who come from varying social backgrounds. The solution to any element of perceived class difference – one can hardly call it 'antagonism' in the context of this film – is perhaps contained in the sub plot involving a rich society girl who has been drafted to the factory and eventually falls in love with the foreman. Occupation it seems 'breaks down class barriers'.†

The stress on National Character can in part be attributed to the influence of war and the concomitant feeling of an identity of interests against 'the enemy'. The emphasis on community can in

**Cinema* 1943.

†*Kinematograph Weekly* September 30th 1943.



The pit disaster in *The Stars Look Down*

part, however, be attributed to the middle class perspective which pervaded all films of the period, regardless of subject matter. The films of Pen Tennyson – *Proud Valley*, *The Way Ahead*; John Baxter – *Love on the Dole*, *The Common Touch*; Sidney Gilliat – *Millions Like Us* and Carol Reed – *The Stars Look Down* – had an involvement with working class life and a concentration on contemporary subject matter and documentary truth which was completely lacking in the cinema of the twenties and thirties. Yet with one exception – Carol Reed's *The Stars Look Down* – they ignore the fact that social classes in Britain do not have common interests. One film, *Proud Valley* (1940) did have in the original script the inclusion of elements of social conflict. The film tells of a negro merchant seaman looking for work in South Wales during the depression years and the form of his integration into a closely knit mining community. Michael Balcon who was in charge of the production of the film at Ealing says of it:

'In the original script the miners were shown defying the mine owners and opening up a disused pit on a cooperative basis to make a livelihood, but this was obviously neither tactful nor helpful propaganda when the country was at war, especially as in real life the miners had given a lead by reacting vigorously to the national call for greater production. So after the outbreak of war we amended the ending of the script to fit in with the national mood. It was not, perhaps, quite the film Pen wanted to make, in the first instance, but it was an unqualified success.'³

As during the war period miners did strike (and were imprisoned) one must conclude that industrial conflict was therefore clearly

manifest and that Balcon's 'national mood' was certainly not the mood of even the specific section of the population with which Tennyson was dealing. Balcon's 'national mood' could more adequately be described as the 'middle class mood'. Thus his middle class perspective led to a film with the typical elements of the so called 'socially realistic' films of that period. A portrayal of industrial working people who are caricatured by the act of abstracting any element of class ideology and attitude from the subjects, leaves a film which is 'realistic' only in the sense that it deals with a working class environment and people, a topic which before and during that period had been virtually ignored. Beyond that point one finds an unauthentic representation of the 'common everyday life' of a virtually apolitical people whose lives are enriched by that 'typical' down to earth working class humour. In other words, the films patronize.

To say that these films do not include any reference to the divergent interests of different social groups is not to imply that they exclude all class elements. There is almost always an all pervading sense of 'Englishness', but this is linked with a delineation of the characters along strict class lines. The members of each class conform to a rigid stereotype. This stereotyping was (and still is) a common feature of British films. English actors generally become character actors, playing the role of someone in a particular class position. This is particularly obvious in war films, in which actors will consistently play either an officer or one of the men. Their roles carry over into non-war films where the actors who play officers retain their middle-class identity.

A certain ambiguity arises from this tradition. The consistent playing of a social type by an actor leads to a stereotype which militates against the realism of a film. Yet at the same time, we have become so accustomed to the character actor that when he steps outside his usual role or when he plays people of various classes, the part lacks conviction. John Mills and Richard Attenborough, for example, play both middle and working class characters. Richard Attenborough has gone up through the ranks in various war films, played a working class recalcitrant (*The Angry Silence*), a spiv (*Brighton Rock*) and even a mentally disturbed professional man (*The Man Upstairs*). John Mills, who frequently plays middle-class roles has also played, in *The Family Way*, a working class father, with all the relevant appendages, braces, shirt sleeves, and a northern accent. The result of the British tradition of the character actor is that almost *nothing* seems authentic in the way, for example, that the characters of the post war films by Rossellini are.

One film, early in this period, which deals quite explicitly with

the conflict of interests between Labour and Capital, is Carol Reed's *The Stars Look Down* (1939), based on the novel by A. J. Cronin, which deals with a Northumberland mining community. On one level the film works as a depiction of a working community. Some of the characters are drawn with no sense of caricature and many of the scenes convey well the grim feature of mining life, the absolute dependence of the miners on the local mine as the sole source of employment and their fundamental opposition to the interests of the mine owner. Other of the characters do, however, lack authenticity. Joe, a local bookmaker's assistant, is the precursor of the spiv of later films. The mine owner, Arthur Barrass, is grotesquely exaggerated and this is a weakness of the film. The film is so overweighted towards the miners that Barrass is sketched only in the most *cliché* of terms. Barrass represents all the miners are fighting against, but his character is drawn with no real depth. As a result of the opposition being so weakly portrayed, much of the film's direction is destroyed. Fenwick, the young man who sees education as providing the channel to the political arena, where he can fight for the miners' rights is also weakly drawn. More significantly, his role in the film considerably detracts from the positive element of the theme of Labour's political struggle. Paul Rotha, contrasting Cronin's novel with the film, says:

'Fenwick in the film ends by starting out in the world to put wrong right; he catches the 10.15 up-train to nowhere in particular – an



The Stars Look Down: On one level the film works as a depiction of a working community

idealist, a crank, a daffy without even the equipment with which Mr. Smith went to Washington.

Therein lies the impotence of this film. Not only does it imply – not state, note – imply that unionism is a negative, often harmful, thing, but it makes the hero prompted by motives which are those of an “intellectual” dreamer, a man born out of his class.’⁴

The faults of *The Stars Look Down* do not alter its importance as the first British film to face squarely a social issue. No film had attempted this before. Michael Balcon writing on the films he made during the twenties and thirties admits that:

‘None of my films (and as far as I can remember few of the plays and books of the period) in any way reflected the despair of the times in which we were living. On my bookshelves to this day I find *The Town that was Murdered* by Ellen Wilkinson, and all the other Left Bookclub publications, but little of their influence is reflected in the films we were making. It was not until 1939 that I realized the place of films in Society, and then perhaps insufficiently.’⁵

Films in the two decades after *The Stars Look Down* treated class in political terms as taboo. Even Humphrey Jennings, whose Marxist background could have influenced him to make films that faced the realities of class in England, stressed national rather than class character. Basil Wright says of his war films:

‘Unity of purpose and comradesly spirit which inspired the whole British people were also an inspiration to him’.⁶

This was not just a feature of his war films, his post-war work such as *The Cumberland People* and *The Silent Village* emphasized a sense of community. What distinguished his films from those of other directors dealing with ‘ordinary people’ was, as has often been pointed out, their ‘poetic quality’ and also their lack of patronization. His films have a rare feeling for and observation of working class life.

Up to the late fifties the British feature cinema consisted primarily of films reflecting the past. Historical films such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Alexander Korda) *Catherine the Great* (Paul Czinner) and *Nell Gwyn* (Herbert Wilcox), abounded in the thirties; almost no attention was given to any aspect of contemporary life outside that of the middle classes. Only the documentary film indulged in any form of social realism and that was of a limited kind. In the forties there emerged a few films depicting working class life, but most retained a strong middle-class perspective; this continued in the films of the fifties. The class issue was avoided in several ways: first, by

emphasizing the past, either in the historical films of, for example, Dickens's *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* (David Lean) and Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Hamlet* (Laurence Olivier), or else in the patriotic war films which emphasized the greatness of Britain in her fight against great odds. The war films also tended to harden class stereotypes and to ignore any but psychologically based antagonism between men. Secondly there were the comedy films, notably the Ealing comedies, where the fun element completely eclipsed any socially critical aspect. Lastly there were the films dealing specifically with middle-class life, *The Winslow Boy*, *French Without Tears* (Anthony Asquith) and *Brief Encounter* (David Lean) are obvious examples.

Taking into account the virtual avoidance of social realism in British feature films, it is interesting to compare three accounts of the British film industry up to this time. Peter Cowie who considers that Anthony Asquith reflects the 'best of England' says of his films – they:

'reflect like a prism the many facets of English life, the humour, the gossip, the odd character, the maliciousness, the love, and above all the unwritten adherence to a code of behaviour and honour that seems to be vanishing today.'⁷



We Are the Lambeth Boys: Offers a subtle form of patronization of its subject

John Alexander, whilst not wholeheartedly supporting the cinema industry's view of society, contends that:

'National feeling, life and traditions are being reflected to a greater extent than previously in films produced in Britain.'⁸

But his examples and the reasons he gives for supporting these films as true reflections of British life are ludicrous, seen in any sort of sociological framework. *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, the story of a village fighting to maintain the local railway against bureaucratic interference has 'real feeling for the beauty of the British countryside'. *Doctor in the House* has 'zest for real life, portrayal of real people in real situations' and *Conflict of Wings*, in which the villagers mobilize against the threat to the local bird sanctuary by the RAF shows the 'fight for peace and local rights'.

That these films represent the nearest that the British Cinema had got to a realistic portrayal of ordinary people would be an overstatement. Nor is it true to say that they in any way accurately portrayed the social life and major social issues of the time – Ealing comedies, for example, were not conceived on a social basis – but more as situation comedy. In fact the British cinema industry seemed to be bending over backwards to avoid making any comment on contemporary events. *Hue and Cry*, *Passport to Pimlico*, *Whisky Galore*, etc. are set in authentic locations, but ignore social comment. Someone who did criticize British films for this fault was Lindsay Anderson. He says:

'According to the testimony of our film makers (the oath is administered by the Censor), Britain is a country without problems, in which no essential changes have occurred for the last fifty years, and which still remains the centre of an Empire on which the sun will never have the bad manners to set.'⁹

This was written in the mid fifties, but long before, since 1947 in fact, Anderson and other writers had been attacking the British Cinema in *Sequence*, of which he was an editor. Their attack was not only on the social irrelevance of British films, but on their aesthetic conservatism – 'not many' British films 'have had enough imagination or integrity to achieve anything approaching artistic success' and 'the first duty of the artist is, not to interpret, nor to propagandize, but to create', wrote Anderson.¹⁰

By 1955 the film critics of *Sequence* had become film makers. Lindsay Anderson made *O Dreamland* in 1954 and (with Guy Brenton) *Thursday's Children*, Tony Richardson and Karel Reisz followed a year later with *Momma Don't Allow*. The Committee for 'Free Cinema' stated that 'implicit in our attitude is a belief in freedom, in the importance of people and in the significance of the everyday', a not very different attitude from that of the documentary film makers

of the thirties and forties. Indeed Lindsay Anderson has written in praise of the work of Humphrey Jennings, admiring his sensitive handling of 'ordinary people'.¹¹

The début into film making of these directors is interesting. Their critical polemic in *Sequence* and their setting up of a distinctive programme which they labelled 'Free Cinema' is in many ways reminiscent of the French New Wave – not in the quality of the films produced, but in the passage from criticism to film making. The writers in *Sequence* recognized the difficulty of getting into feature film making and therefore entered through the medium of documentary. The documentary industry, unlike that of the feature industry, was expanding due to industrial sponsorship. One wonders to what extent the production of *Sequence* was an attempt to enter the British film industry by similar tactics to those of the French film critics. Certainly they were well aware of the French situation. Karel Reisz in a letter to *Films and Filming* December 1961: drew an analogy between the French and the activists of 'Free Cinema'.

'wasn't the revival of the French cinema in the past few years initiated from the outside by amateurs?'

Whatever their motives, the people behind *Sequence* had, however, got into film making. Firstly through the British Film Institute's Experimental Film Fund, then through Industrial documentary. Later, by way of the Royal Court and the general revolution in literature and the theatre, they entered feature film making. Richardson in association with John Osborne set up Woodfall Films, which gave new directors a chance to make feature films.

We Are The Lambeth Boys and *Every Day Except Christmas* were made through the prestige sponsorship of the Ford Company. *Every Day Except Christmas* (Lindsay Anderson) was an account of a night's work at Covent Garden Market. In many ways it succeeded in the same way as Jennings films did, in portraying, without caricature, the everyday life of working people, though its overall effect is of a pastiche of a pre-war coalmining documentary. *We Are The Lambeth Boys* (Karel Reisz) is a description of the members of a South London Youth Club, their lives outside and within the Club. It does not patronize its subject, as the feature films that the 'Free Cinema' writers objected to did. Nevertheless, there is a different and more subtle form of condescension. Richard Hoggart, who tends to celebrate a rather sentimental and idealized picture of working-class life, says of the film in a letter to Karel Reisz:

'If I read it right, it is meant to embody your own sense of some of the most important qualities possessed by these young people at a London Youth Club – the strength and the variety of their vitality, their lively, tolerant and complex sense of community.'¹²

He gives as examples the 'vivid ride through the West End' and the 'shrewdness and confusion of the debates'. To take up one of his examples – the debates between the Youth Club members – there is a very clear sense in which the members of the Club are patronized by the film. During the discussion on capital punishment the commentator cuts into one of the boys remarks with a comment which reflects a totally middle-class conception of what working class youth needs. In other scenes the commentary imputes motives and feelings, describes actions and recounts the past history of the subjects in a sympathetic yet condescending manner. A girl working at a repetitious task provokes the remark that 'work is something that has to be done and it is good to have it. Just the same, the day doesn't go quickly'. Similarly, earlier in the film, the amiable middle-class voice adds, quite unnecessarily, to the visual image, the comment that a 'chat and a giggle for the girls' starts the evening at the club off well. It comes as no surprise that Hoggart liked the elements that stressed the sense of working-class community – for his descriptions of working class life tend to emphasize the traditional in the same way as the members of 'Free Cinema' did.

It was after the production of the shorts of the Free Cinema that a new kind of social realism emerged in British Films: deriving to a large extent from a new movement in the theatre and literature. In 1959 two films came to the screen – *Look Back in Anger* directed by Tony Richardson and produced by Woodfall Films and *Room At The Top* directed by Jack Clayton. Both films, though different thematically, contained elements which had been completely lacking in British Cinema. They both had protagonists who were very much aware of their class and expressed it. In *Look Back in Anger* this aspect is played down in comparison with the play from which it is taken. The social references in the play are replaced by scenes centring on the colour problem. The absurdities of class which are contained in the play are understated in the film. *Room At The Top* deals more specifically with the class issue. Joe Lampton is aiming for the 'top' and is prepared to sacrifice his integrity to do so. Dufton, his home town, symbolizes for him all the deprivations of working class life: a life he has come from. Yet in all the scenes where the fact of his origin is raised – and it is frequently blatantly emphasized, for this is by no means a subtle film – one can never really see the working class character in terms other than Laurence Harvey assuming a northern accent. He can scream 'Let me tell you I *am* working class and proud of it', but as a character he is over simplified and lacks conviction – even taking into account that he is an aspirant to a bourgeois way of life. The whole film lacks authenticity: the superficial documentary type shots when Joe returns to Dufton might have been given a depth which could have been set against the

middle-class setting of *Waverley*. The scene with the child, proud of her garden of dandelions in the midst of industrial rubble (this image is repeated in *This Sporting Life* where Frank looks out of the window on to a dirty back yard where a child is making a small garden with a pile of earth, is a motif which can also be found in earlier works like Philip Leacock's *Innocent Sinners* – 1958) does not succeed in making its point; it remains on a sentimental level. The



The Angry Silence: A contrived image – the 'blackleg' isolating himself on a matter of principle



This Sporting Life: Lindsay Anderson's first feature film

Aunt 'stick to your own kind Joe', and Uncle are the obvious British caricatures, which have their roots in the theatre.

The significance of *Room At The Top* and *Look Back In Anger*, in the context of British Cinema, is that they actually express the fact that Britain is a country in which classes exist and certain situations arise because of the existence of this stratification. Also, they introduced new writers and directors (Jack Clayton's only previous film was a short, *The Bespoke Overcoat*) into the feature film industry. What neither film did was to introduce new actors and this to a large extent marred both films. Richard Burton in *Look Back In Anger* retains much of his Shakespearian origins and Laurence Harvey is much too sophisticated an actor for the part of Joe Lampton. Within the context of the socially realistic film, *Room At The Top* raised a problem which was to become apparent in later films. The problem was the eradication of the stereotype which had existed for so long in British films, personified at one end of the scale by Kenneth More and the other by Kathleen Harrison. In *Room At The Top* various things emerge: first, that whether outside the mainstream of British Cinema or not, the stereotyped playing of a character of a particular class was being retained, though to a lesser extent than previously. The use of actors who had come up through the British tradition of 'the character actor' was a major factor in the continuance of this. Also, a new form of stereotype emerged, deriving from the use of a subjective style. Instead of using an interior monologue *Room At The Top* and the films of the same type were filmed as if

account the social background of many of the directors (for example, Richardson – Wadham College and Anderson – Public School and then Wadham College) it is. They concentrate on a slightly sentimentalized view of a working class life, which has a much greater sense of community than is perhaps accurate. The Hoggart perspective is emphasized throughout. The television set has reached the working class home, but once the shift is made to a semi-detached house the occupants become lower-middle-class with all the *clichés* that go with that presumed style of life: a particularly good example is Ingrid's mother in *A Kind of Loving*.

None of the films of Richardson, Reisz, Anderson, Schlesinger, Furie (I am thinking particularly of *The Leather Boys*) which deal with working class life appears in such a poor light, though, when compared with the socially realistic films which preceded them and the films that they stimulated other directors into making.

Other films of the same period which deal with social issues never step outside the framework of pre 'Free Cinema' films. It is interesting, for example, that none of the 'Free Cinema' directors dealt specifically with industrial conflict. That there is a conflict of interests between middle and working class is clear in most of the Free Cinema 'directors' films, but it is subtle; there were no explicitly political films. Yet outside of these directors there were at least three directly political films. *I'm All Right Jack* (John Boulting), *The Angry Silence* (Guy Green) and *No Love For Johnnie* (Ralph Thomas). All of them deal, quite specifically, with a form of social conflict, but none of them is successful as a film. *The Angry Silence* gives a crude representation of Trade Unionism and of the workers' lives and though it deals with a contemporary issue it never steps outside the caricatures of the pre 'Free Cinema' tradition. *I'm All Right Jack* attempts to deal with the subject by treating it as farce. It dodges the issue by a cynical parody of all sides – the workers, the shop stewards, the management – ending with an *exposé* of their hypocrisy by that stock earnest young clown of British Cinema, Ian Carmichael, whose solution to the situation is to opt out altogether, by retiring to a nudist colony. *No Love For Johnnie* deals with a Labour MP who aspires to the Front Bench and is prepared to abandon all his political convictions to achieve his aims. All these films appear as attempts to deal with 'Free Cinema' subject matter within the constrictions of the traditional British Cinema.

In one sense too, the subject matter of these films is outmoded. In 1939, when *The Stars Look Down* was made, Capital versus Labour was an issue which was felt as far more pertinent to the working class situation than it is today. There is some evidence that working class attitudes are now moving towards a slightly more individualistic

orientation – and although the films of the Free Cinema directors do not show us a strongly individualistic, home-centred proletariat, they do centre on characters who feel that they have to make their own way in the world – unlike the miners of *The Stars Look Down* who know that achievement can only come from collective action. At the same time, films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* do reflect a division of interest between classes, but the issue is not dealt with head on. One of the most impressive of the 'Free Cinema' directors' films is *This Sporting Life* which deals with a unique man, his ambition and his need for love. It is set in a working class environment, but the central character is not in any way a 'typical worker'. *The Angry Silence* and the other films of its type are too conscious of their 'social message' and attempt to view class conflict from the most obvious of standpoints.

Since the mid-sixties few British films have gone back to the setting of working class life – though most retain the stereotypes that have always existed in the British Cinema. What seems to have happened is that, rather than view the contemporary social issues from within an alien class, British middle class directors have attempted to face these issues from their own middle class standpoint. This is not to say that British directors have been avidly exploring their position *vis-a-vis* society, far from it. Tony Richardson, for example, has made only one film – *Laughter In The Dark* – with any real contemporary social relevance since *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* in 1962. Clive Donner's *Nothing But The Best*



I'm All Right Jack: "Three cheers for Winston Churchill and Stanley Windrush"

is a characteristic attempt to absorb social comment into comedy and also to divorce the subject of social conflict. This is also a feature of Reisz's *Morgan*. Albert Finney's *Charlie Bubbles* is resolved in the manner of *I'm All Right Jack* – the hero floats away, at the end, in a balloon. Lindsay Anderson in *If . . .* explores society from the position of the upper middle classes, looks at their values and their hypocrisy and contemplates the Revolutionary solution. The era of the proletarian orientated film is over, it seems. We are back with the middle classes, their problems and phantasies, back to the 'white telephone' film which was the apt description for the pre Neo-Realist films in Italy and which Lindsay Anderson used to describe the British films of the fifties.

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The idea for this article arose from discussion with Kevin Gough-Yates.

'styleme' 'semanteme'
'plerematic stratum'
Signs and Meaning
in the Cinema

by ANDREW McTAGGART

In his recent book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema** Peter Wollen is particularly concerned with a study of film at a high level of abstraction, in order to find fruitful approaches to outstanding problems of film aesthetics. 'For much too long', he writes, 'film aesthetics and film criticism, in the Anglo-Saxon countries at least, have been privileged zones, private reserves in which thought has developed along its own lines, haphazardly, irrespective of what goes on in the larger realms of ideas.' In attempting to correct this, he examines the culture of Russia in the 1920's in relation to Eisenstein and his theories of montage; he gives an exposition of the *auteur* theory rooting it in Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology and de Saussure's structural linguistics; and he makes a critical appraisal of semiology – the science of signs – in order to propose a reformulation of categories which would adequately encompass the complexity of film language. He continues this discussion in an essay in *Working Papers on the Cinema: Sociology and Semiology*. †The BFI booklet takes up an interdisciplinary approach,

and consists of reprinted papers, presented at a series of seminars organized by the BFI Education Department. Unfortunately, they are over-densely written for a non-specialist audience.) A more appropriate language of exposition is needed and I would point to the educationist Bruner's optimistic contention that 'the foundation of any subject may be taught to anybody at any age in some form'.¹ In one paper Paul Filmer asserts: 'There is a real current need for some sort of objective structural analysis, of the mass media', which leads us back to Peter Wollen's contention. But Paul Filmer's notion of 'structural' is concerned with communication theory and sociological analysis as an aid to a fuller description of mass media products, before evaluation takes place. Peter Wollen's view of the term is of a particular kind of analysis, concentrating on an extraction of thematic motifs from a range of films by a particular director, in order to elucidate the reading of particular films by him (and incidentally to establish his credentials as an *auteur*, a personal artist working within the confines of the commercial cinema). Both

* Secker & Warburg, 15s.

† Published by the British Film Institute, 7s 6d.

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views suggest the need for as complete a description of the work as possible, and it is clear that the contribution of the descriptive sciences could be invaluable, though how 'value free' they might be in this field is doubtful.

One can only regret the omission of a psychological approach, and this is echoed in the introduction to the new Penguin: *Psychology and the Visual Arts* edited by James Hogg. Most of these papers do deal directly with painting and graphics. 'Sculpture and the movies (admittedly a mixed media) are poorly served by psychological writers. I have avidly pursued such titles as 'The Psychology of the Cinema' only to find that the author likes Chaplin and that close-ups isolate some part of the action, and sadly papers specifically on these topics are not included'.² A germinal point of contact might be the essays in 'Studies in Cognitive Growth',³ particularly those concerning perception and perceptual recognition – the organization of incoming stimuli and the relating of this organized perception to one or more categories in the act of recognition itself. Here, the ability of Polanski in *Repulsion* to induce a child-like state of fear in his audience through barely-glimpsed shots of an intruder in a wardrobe mirror, might be usefully described in psychological terms.

But of course this is only a tentative beginning, and some light does emerge. Thus a suggestion by Peter Wollen that there might be a useful analogy between Bernstein's concept of 'restricted' and 'elaborated' code and the *auteur* and *genre* film can be questioned by Frank West (p. 28) and the

latter's suggestion that 'logically it seems necessary to begin with the single frame, which can in turn be analysed into very simple compositional units', is worth considering alongside Eisenstein's concept of the shot as the unit of measurement.

Peter Wollen is the better expositor of his chosen fields and is very much at ease in an astonishing variety of subjects. However, his very facility betrays him into making excursions, mercifully short, into thickets of technical terms or abstruse references which can trip the unwary reader. His discussion of Howard Hawks as an *auteur* ends as follows:

'Hawks first attracted attention because he was regarded naïvely as an action director. Later the thematic content which I have outlined was detected and revealed. Beyond the stylemes, semantemes were found to exist; the films were anchored in an objective stratum of meaning, a plerematic stratum, as the Danish linguist Hjelmslev would put it. Thus the stylistic expressiveness of Hawks's films was shown to be not purely contingent, but grounded in significance.'⁴

The particular terms used by Hjelmslev, 'styleme', 'semanteme' and 'plerematic stratum', are to be found only in a specialized dictionary of linguistic terms; they do not find a place or an explanation in a recent comprehensive survey of linguistic theory.⁵ An index and a glossary of terms are surely needed, distinguishing clearly, for example, 'Symbolist' (after Baudelaire) and 'symbolic' (after Saussure) which occur within a few

pages of each other, the latter without definition (p. 69) in the essay on Eisenstein.

Privileged zones, private reserves are not best opened up by this procedure, and indeed there is the danger of new ones being staked out. The distance between the critic and his audience may in these instances easily be widened. David Daiches in his *Critical Approaches to Literature*, reminds us of an occupational danger:

'If the critic becomes too far removed from the reader of literature – not necessarily from the "man in the street", that vague entity, but from the interested and sensitive non-professional – he will tend to develop a technical jargon of his own and to regard himself as a necessary mediator between the creative writer and the ordinary reader. Indeed, in so far as he will be intelligible only to fellow experts, he will not even be a mediator between writer and public, but a barrier indicating the impossibility of non-professional appreciation of good literature.'⁶

If there are some elements in Peter Wollen's writing which can cause difficulty, there are also controversial judgements of films. *Alexander Nevsky* is Eisenstein's worst film, 'an artistic disaster'. No explanation in terms of the film is offered, only in terms of Eisenstein's development from his concept of montage as collision to that of mental fusion – and this Peter Wollen finds conservative if not retrograde. It is the element of assertion which is disquieting; the view of *Nevsky* might be argued, but it never is. With Hawks there

is an assumption that a complexity of contrasting thematic devices makes him a major film director, without reference to other contributing qualities. 'Eventually it is the explanation of this system of oppositions which will define Hawks'.⁷

Peter Wollen has his reasons for such apparently arbitrary judgements. It is clear from Appendix Two on 'Pantheon Directors' that it is done in the cause of 'critical audacity'. 'Without such audacity, I see little point in being a film critic'. Perhaps in the best Dadaist tradition, his pronouncements are meant to work like a bomb: to disturb complacency, and provoke a re-examination of established judgements.

His position becomes more puzzling when one considers the statement on p. 102 of his book. 'As always with film criticism, the impossibility of quotation is a severe handicap'. Thus, the usual method of the critic, especially one following the precept of F. R. Leavis in looking closely at and quoting from a text, is almost deliberately avoided. Yet this view is consistent with a theme running through his writing and linking him with the Eisenstein of the twenties: a search for a scientific basis for describing film and film language to obtain public agreement on what can be made objective. This is made particularly obvious in the distinction he makes between coded and graded means of communication. The former corresponds to the two levels of denotation and connotation. He elaborates on this in a quotation from Christian Metz, describing Eisenstein's famous shot from *Que*

Viva Mexico of the heads of three peasants buried in the sand, tormented yet peaceful after they had been trampled upon by the hooves of their oppressors' horses. The denotative level would simply indicate that they had suffered and were dead. But because of the nobility of the landscape, the beautiful triangular composition, the image expresses to Metz 'the grandeur of the Mexican people, the certainty of final victory, a kind of passionate love which the northerner feels for the sun-drenched splendours of the scene'. To della Volpe, the Italian writer on aesthetics, this latter kind of interpretation can have no objective validity, it could never be established and argued like the paraphrasable meaning of a verbal text. There is no objective code; therefore there can only be subjective impressions. Peter Wollen agrees with this except that he leaves room for an approach to a *de jure* criticism even in the latter field. Since, however, it is the more difficult area of study, he leaves it to one side in his own criticism of Hawks and Ford, where he concentrates on an analysis of the thematic motifs which can be extracted from their work when seen as a whole and which are then applied to the individual work. But this method inevitably appears over-schematic and intellectual, since it leaves out the emotional and aesthetic effect of the work. With all its nebulosity and private meanings, we feel the connotative aspect is of vital importance – some kind of rough guide needs to be provided to keep the artistic experience in front of us. As Daiches points out, 'there is a need in a critic for a fully developed technique of

suggestion'; otherwise the work may recede for 'the truth that the critic can know about a work, and precisely communicate, is part of the larger truth he can only suggest'.⁹

Peter Wollen, runs the risk of losing the real vitality of the work, presumably in the interests of following a method boldly. Thus, if he provides us with the key, arising from a valid analysis, to Hawks and Ford, he can argue that we can well provide the connotations for ourselves. He would agree with Geoffrey Nowell-Smith in his summary of the *auteur* theory as it is presented today: 'The purpose of criticism thus becomes to uncover behind the superficial contracts of subject and treatment a hard core of basic and often recondite motifs. The pattern formed by these motifs . . . is what gives an author's work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another'.¹⁰

Considered as a scientific method, this approach is open to criticism. Just how are superficial contrasts and the hard core revealed? Would everyone bring out the same thematic content? The same problem occurs with the anthropologist and his structural analysis. Charbonnier, the French art critic, in his *Conversations with Lévi-Strauss* has remarked, 'We feel an affinity with the anthropologist in so far as he is the kind of scientist who uses his poetic sensibility as a means of acquiring knowledge'.¹⁰ In the hands of an insensitive analyst an idea might be torn from its context, although it gets its sense from the role it plays in the system. Pareto's method of social analysis

has been criticized in this way by Peter Winch.¹² What safeguards are there that the extraction of themes will be objectively accurate? How is competence in reviewing a film defined?

However, the *auteur* theory is not intended to apply to material which is likely to cause controversy over its basic meaning, since Peter Wollen sees it as 'the theoretical basis for a critical investigation and assessment of the American cinema, as a model for the commercial cinema'.

What thematic preoccupations does he find in Hawks's films? 'The highest human emotion is the camaraderie of the exclusive, self-sufficient all-male group'. Women are excluded normally, and are only admitted after proving themselves worthy of entry. There is a similarity here, and in other features, to the adolescent gang and Peter Wollen finds that his Spartan heroes are 'cruelly stunted'. There is another side to Hawks in the world of the crazy comedies: here the men are victims, often of domineering women. Thus the heroes become victims. 'If we take the adventure dramas alone, it would seem that Hawks's work is flaccid, lacking in dynamism; it is only when we consider the crazy comedies that it becomes rich, begins to ferment: alongside every dramatic hero we are aware of a phantom, stripped of mastery, humiliated, inverted'.

This analysis does not seem very fruitful. Hawks's heroes do not become more dramatic by the ghostly appearance of an alter ego at their shoulders. They are tied to their *genres*, they are 'stunted' only in the sense of being two-

dimensional characters. The intrusion of another, comic, attitude to Cary Grant's realm in *Only Angels Have Wings* would burst his insulated world apart. The drama works as a drama *because* he is presented in such a way that he attains heroic status, through keeping out elements which would be too disturbing, and building up approval and admiration around him.

Yet I would agree that the special quality of Hawks's work is partly the presence of an all-male group, and I would add that he is particularly skilful in dealing with the phenomenon that has been called 'the male bond'. It is interesting too, that the conflict which is handled so well in *Only Angels Have Wings* arises from the presence of a woman – the showgirl played by Jean Arthur. But the strength of the film arises, not from an imported sense of woman dominating man, but from other qualities which take hold of Jean Arthur in it – the desire to make a lasting relationship and to settle down – in a situation where day-to-day living seems the best solution.

The great attraction of *Only Angels Have Wings* is the sense of ease with which the characters act and this is reflected in the way it is presented. Where the codes of the genre are well known, the actors have a sense of freedom. It is this rigidly defined way of life, and its defence mechanism to keep the thought of death at bay, which is threatened with disintegration by the presence of Jean Arthur. Hawks uses his professionalism and his actors not to make a drama more slick, but to expand it at the points where the situations come closest to real life.

The structural analysis of John Ford's work suffers from a similar over-schematization, although there is no attempt to reduce resemblances to one motif, 'abstract and impoverished'. Instead Peter Wollen charts a whole series of shifting variations. It is difficult to agree that it is 'the richness of the shifting relations between antinomies in Ford's work that makes him a great artist'. This does not explain Ford's power as a director. One would like to consider, for example, the connotative use of landscape imagery in his Westerns – but, Peter Wollen does not find such imagery amenable, as yet, to his particular kind of analysis. It may be, however, that he leaves this aspect simply to his illustrations since he would regard verbal explanation as totally inadequate.

Peter Wollen's intellectual emphasis does not seem to me the one which best opens up the work of such fundamentally anti-intellectual directors like Hawks and Ford. He is much more at home with a director like Eisenstein. This is not to deny the aspirations and potential usefulness of the method, only to criticize its application in particular cases. One still wants to find out how a film 'reads' first of all, and to give as full a description as possible before evaluation, in so far as description itself can be made objective.

In the essay, 'The Semiology of the Cinema', he is concerned with the question of finding a scientific basis for criticism, this time based on the science of linguistics. It is a merit of his account of the development in semiology that he traces the shifting variations in the relations between semiology, which

began as the parent discipline, and linguistics, as one of its children, with ease and clarity. A consideration of the work of the empiricist philosopher C. S. Peirce, leads him to a tri-partite classification of signs, made by the latter, which offers the possibility of being the most comprehensive yet attempted. Signs to him are either iconic, indexical or symbolic.

Theorists in the realist tradition, like Bazin, were mainly concerned with only one of these categories, the indexical, that is, where there is an existential bond between the sign and its object. This kind of sign is concerned with what the image implies. Peirce's example is, 'I see a man with a rolling gait. This is a probable indication that he is a sailor'. Bresson, following Bazin, tried to imply spiritual qualities through concentrating on the faces of his non-actors – an approach which Pasolini also takes. What Bazin left out was a consideration of the Méliès tradition – seen in the German expressionist cinema, von Sternberg, the horror film and the cartoon. Von Sternberg sought to disown the existential bond between the natural world and the image, and the dream world he created exemplifies the iconic appeal of the sign. Peirce's definition seems at odds with Wollen's illustration of it and would appear to need re-definition: 'An icon, according to Peirce, is a sign which represents its object mainly by its similarity to it; the relationship between signifier and signified is not arbitrary but one of resemblance or likeness. This is in contrast to the 'symbolic' sign which is that of spoken and written language – where there is neither

resemblance to its object nor any existential bond with it. The connection between the sign and its object is 'arbitrary'. For example, a 'booklet' is shorter than a 'book', although the word is longer. Peirce also emphasized that each classification showed a dominant aspect; other aspects might be secondary – as in onomatopoeia (an iconic aspect in symbolic language).

Whatever the difficulties of the term 'iconic', the three-part classification has the advantage of being not only comprehensive and flexible, but also able to accommodate within its description both the main traditions of film – the Lumière, the Méliès – and to account for their co-presence in a film by Godard.

If one function of the critic is to make readily available, through coining an adequate terminology, the discoveries of film-makers working in their medium, then this classification of signs is a major step forward. A description of film language which is basically inadequate will cause great difficulty when it comes to assessing works which are outside its terms of reference – like Kracauer's inability to deal with the musical. As in linguistic theory, description should be dependent on the language itself, including developments within the language, and must be prepared to modify itself when changes take place. English grammar, till quite recently, tended to take up a prescriptive stance – to dictate what was correct English – although its description contained features which were based on Latin models, for example, in its treatment of case. The influence of linguistic theory has

been to concentrate attention on how language is used now, not what it has outgrown, and attempt an adequate description of it.

This has important implications for the study of film in schools. Too often the study of film is concerned only with the realistic tradition and with the fictional feature film, leading to a consideration of film language as something dealing with sequential narrative events. The outcome in the use of this language, as far as film making is concerned, has been the school story film.

A study of film in Peter Wollen's categories could lead to a widening of the possibilities for the use of film: towards documentary, animation, the film loop, creation of environments etc., where each type would not be seen as cut off wholly from any other.

At a basic school level, the varied use of the image could be taught in a variety of classroom situations; these could be structured up to a point by the teacher and their formulation would be influenced by the school area and facilities, the age group taught and, of course, the season. A situation like a meeting or a parting could be proposed, using light on the close-up of a face to suggest events taking place off-screen and pupils would be required to invent and try out situations arising from some of the following events: a door opening and closing; a train leaving; traffic lights changing; a beam of light finding a face. This indexical use could also be explored using sound effects or a tape recorder: a police or ambulance siren approaching; a bugle call. Experiments could be made with

the iconic mode by constructing artificial environments and using animated figures. The symbolic with iconic undertones could be explored by looking at the possibilities of expressive titling. And it is in the interaction of these categories that the most fruitful results could occur.

Such methods could be the beginning of an active method of teaching the basic language of film; through an exploration of its possibilities, some of which are structured for discovery, but leaving room for a variety of interpretations. It would be hoped here that skill would combine with flexibility to give a meaningful fluency.

Interweaving such work could be an appreciation of able film-makers tackling similar problems; the climax of the near-suicide on the station platform in *Brief Encounter*, or an extract from Dreyer's *Joan of Arc* to indicate other people's indexical and iconic/indexical use of film. At some levels of study, the full-length feature film for example, the emphasis would be on appreciation, on training in discrimination.

Exposure to different types of cinema would also be a great help when dealing with films in terms of themes like 'war', 'race' and 'leisure'. The inability to read any film except the conventional realist is often a stumbling block. The extract from *Alexander Nevsky*, for example, 'Waiting on the Ice', is often read in the same way as a realist film – there has even been an attempt to re-edit it in the dubbed version to make it 'conform' to Griffith cross-cutting techniques. Interpretation waits upon understanding.

The approach suggested above is rather different from that envisaged by Peter Wollen at the end of the book. A method moving from concept to application – aesthetics first, then applied in a variety of media which would include film – seems unsuitable for children going through secondary school. Rather, the language of film could be apprehended in a variety of uses first and given precise conceptual clarification at a later date; the important point being that a sufficiently wide experience be provided by the teacher. It is here that a comprehensive knowledge would be vital to his role. Even the use of film post-school, in the world outside, need not be confined to the home movie, the record of family outings and changes, where no attempt is usually made to tap the possibilities of film. There is a place in 8 mm. for films with a social purpose. An accident black spot, ignored by the authorities, could be filmed and used as part of documentary evidence in a residents' petition. A minimum of editing would make the case more effective and avoid boredom. At a higher level, where the 'quality of life' in an area is threatened, as it was at Stansted, a film could present a case effectively; for instance, scenes of the area to be despoiled could be filmed and the likely rise in sound could be demonstrated over those scenes. Here, a basic realization that sound can be detached from visuals and made into a projection of the future, yet at the same time run in conjunction with the 'present' on the visuals, would help to make an effective case. In such cases film could provide a voice, a technological

tool to make known the individual's or group's reaction to the forces of technology – just as film itself can make known the projections of planners using technology and prepare people to discuss change.¹³

Often such films may require simply a rudimentary understanding of film language to make their point; but it is retrogressive to assume that they need simply remain at the prosaic level. It is not the subject but the quality of invention which counts and art can emerge, 'as the product of a job well done' in Grierson's phrase.

But art does not simply emerge as the result of effort by itself or a concentration on subject-matter or the pressure of experience; it depends too on a grasp of the medium used. And it is to Peter Wollen's great credit that he seeks to find a description which will keep pace with the expanding grammar of film. He does not see it as something to be unfolded, but as dynamic; and for the critic as

crystalliser and catalyst of new developments.

NOTES

1. *The Process of Education*, J. S.
2. Bruner (Vintage Books, 1966). *Psychology and the Visual Arts*, edited by James Hogg, Introduction, p. 12. *Studies in Cognitive Growth*,
3. J. S. Bruner et al. (Wiley, 1966).
4. Wollen, pp. 91–92.
5. *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, J. Lyons (Cambridge, 1969).
6. *Critical Approaches to Literature* David Daiches (Longmans, 1965), p. 287.
7. *Working Papers*, p. 22.
8. Wollen, p. 152–3.
9. Daiches, p. 392.
10. Wollen, p. 80.
11. *Conversations with Lévi-Strauss*, G. Charbonnier (Cape, 1969), p. 21.
12. *The Idea of a Social Science*, Peter Winch (Routledge), p. 106.
13. V. *The Skeffington Report: 'People and Planning'* (H.M.S.O., 1969).

A POLEMIC

by Roy Armes

There must be something disturbing for critics in the fact that when the shooting of a film really goes well, it means there is no single author. Everybody is responsible for everything. ALAIN RESNAIS

Current discussion of the problems of film criticism in this country is bedevilled by two French words dressed up as apparently meaningful concepts, the notions of *auteur* and *genre*. This use of foreign terms is of itself very characteristic of the uncertainty

with which the cinema is approached. Film has no academic respectability in England, and not one of those of us who make a living out of film criticism has any special qualifications to justify his position. So to cover up our inadequacies a number of plays

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are adopted and rules evolved. On the basic level of language: never use English words when you can use French ones; never employ a monosyllable if you can spell the polysyllabic equivalent; never try down-to-earth terminology where there is a readily accessible source of pseudo-scientific jargon. The trouble with such an approach, however, is that it creates problems where none exist, taking (as in the controversy over *auteur* and *metteur en scène*) linguistic differences for differences in kind. If we talked about who is the person responsible for a film or discussed the way films fall into certain types or categories we should be more intelligible, but more vulnerable. So the terminology – *auteur* and *genre* – persists.

Until the appearance of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, one had assumed that the *auteur* theory as such was dead, killed by its own self-contradictions and by Pauline Kael's devastating analysis in her celebrated polemic 'Squares and Circles' (reprinted in *I Lost it at the Movies*). But, alas, it is not so: Peter Wollen's book is here to show us how naïve we were. However impenetrable the theory, one thing is nevertheless apparent from the very start. The discussion of the *auteur* is not conducive to a prose style that permits easy reading. Just as Miss Kael had to wrestle with the meaning contained in Andrew Sarris's premises, so we are confronted by our own home-bred apologist with this definition of Howard Hawks's stylistic expressiveness: 'Beyond the stylemes, semantemes were found to exist; the films were anchored in an objective stratum of meaning, a plerematic stratum, as the Danish

linguist Hjelmslev would put it' (pp. 91–93).

A distaste for this kind of smoke-screen use of language should not deter one from examining the theory itself, and it would be too easy to list the erudite but totally superfluous detail with which Wollen surrounds and deadens his argument. Our concern is the *auteur* theory itself which Sarris, it may be recalled, based on the two distinctly pedestrian aesthetic categories of 'the technical competence' and 'the distinguishable personality' of the director and on the 'interior meaning' which is 'extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material'. This latter notion reduces itself to absurdity, in that it implies the superiority of a director using uncongenial material over any director who chooses his subject matter and writes his own script. Wollen is far too sophisticated to fall into this kind of error and he notes at the very beginning of his chapter that the 'looseness and diffuseness of the theory has allowed flagrant misunderstandings to take root, particularly among critics in Britain and the United States' (p. 77).

The initial claims put forward for the theory are that it allows us to see that masterpieces are produced not only by 'the cultured gilt on the commercial gingerbread' but also by 'a whole range of authors, whose work had previously been dismissed and consigned to oblivion,' (p. 74) and also that it permits the revaluation of the American periods of directors like Hitchcock, Lang and Renoir. These are by no means exceptional claims and if some critics, like

Robin Wood, tend to overestimate the American cinema (he describes Hitchcock's British films as 'little more than 'prentice work, interesting chiefly because they are Hitchcock's') Wollen himself is more modest. The last words in his book state that 'the best work of Renoir, Rossellini and Mizoguchi is probably better than anything produced in America' (p. 167). Initially then, the theory would seem to be a beneficial one, widening our appreciation of achievement in the cinema. But Wollen's advocacy elsewhere of Samuel Fuller as a major twentieth century artist (he fits the theory if not one's notions of art') should make one aware that evaluation is not one of the strong points of the *auteur* theory.

Wollen rightly points out that the traditional model of an author in the cinema has been 'that of the European directors, with open artistic aspirations and full control over his films' (p. 77). Such a model is clearly inadequate for an assessment of the American cinema as a whole and even those who would contend that it is such European style directors who create the most important works of film art must concede that there are other valid ways of approaching film-making. Europe itself is full of film-makers who fail to fit this kind of model and yet produce interesting films. One would imagine that what is needed is a theory that takes into account the commercial pressures involved in film-making which is so often (and so fruitfully) a collaborative effort. Wollen, however, thinks otherwise: 'What the *auteur* theory does is to take a group of films – the work of one director – and analyse their

structure. Everything irrelevant to this, everything non-pertinent, is considered logically secondary, contingent, to be discarded' (p. 104).

This is clearly a theory that applies much more adequately to the 'European' director with full control over his work. But even here, it leads to an incredible impoverishment of approach. To take the example of Renoir, whom Wollen places so high in his personal pantheon: how can one account adequately for *Boudu sauvé des Eaux* without admitting the contribution of the actor Michel Simon or analyse the structure of *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* without reference to Jacques Prévert's script? These are authentic Renoir works but as the director himself would be the first to admit, crucial contributions have been made by other artists. To limit our assessment to Renoir's own contribution alone is to distort the two works in question. Similarly, with Alain Renais's films, the important thing is not the tenuous links between one work and another, but the director's response to a specific subject. When the *auteur* approach is applied to films in the mainstream of commercial film-making the effect is still more distorting. Instead of assessing the film as he and his neighbours in the cinema see it, the *auteur* critic has to extract the 'directorial factor', base his judgement on the decipherment of the parts he considers relevant to the *auteur*. Everything else – the contributions of producers, cameramen, actors – is 'noise' (Wollen's own term). If one cannot get rid of this 'noise', the work becomes 'an indecipherable palimpsest . . . inaccessible to criticism' (p. 105). Wollen

disregards the essential subjectivity of such a position but it is easy to see how the *auteur* theory in this form quickly becomes the in-game of a clique. Only someone who has seen all the films of a director can make the correct decipherment.

A further complication is introduced by the need to distinguish between an *auteur* and a *metteur en scène*. This is not simply an evaluative distinction ('the great *metteurs en scène* should not be discounted simply because they are not *auteurs*' (p. 113) but the implication throughout is that the very greatest artists are indeed *auteurs*. But how is the difference between the two to be determined? Wollen's first attempt at a distinction is hardly revealing: 'The work of an *auteur* has a semantic dimension, it is not purely formal; the work of the *metteur en scène*, on the other hand, does not go beyond the realm of performance, of transposing into the special complex of cinematic codes and channels a pre-existing text: a scenario, a book or a play. As we shall see, the meaning of the films of an *auteur* is constructed *a posteriori*; the meaning – semantic, rather than stylistic or expressive – of the films of a *metteur en scène* exists *a priori*' (p. 78). While one is still pondering on how the 'semantic dimension' of an *auteur's* work can differentiate it from the *metteur en scène's* with its 'meaning – semantic, rather than stylistic or expressive', Wollen has already issued a quick disclaimer ('In concrete cases, of course, this distinction is not always clear cut') and moved on to other matters.⁴

It is only after a descriptive analysis of Howard Hawks (of which more later) and a learned discourse on

the distinction between composition and performance illustrated by references to music, linguistics, painting, the theatre, literature and typography that Wollen returns specifically to the original dichotomy. By now the issue is considered proved: 'What the *auteur* theory demonstrates is that the director is not simply in command of a performance of a pre-existing text; he is not, or need not be, only a *metteur en scène*' (p. 112). In describing the way in which a director makes alien material his own, Wollen reveals a singularly simplistic concept of artistic creation: 'Incidents and episodes in the original screenplay or novel can act as catalysts; they are the agents which are introduced into the mind (conscious or unconscious) of the *auteur* and react there with the motifs and themes characteristic of his work. The director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes which fuse with his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work' (p. 113). Wollen fails to say why this intrusion of script elements into the *auteur's* mind (conscious or unconscious) should not be considered 'noise', like the intrusion of producers, cameramen or actors. Nor is it shown why these latter cannot also act as catalysts, or what happens when there is no pre-existing screenplay or novel.

Wollen does not concern himself with such matters. Instead he makes the swift sidestep from individual work to generalized abstraction that is characteristic of all his discussion of the *auteur* theory: 'Thus the manifest process of

performance, the treatment of a subject, conceals the latent production of a quite new text, the production of the director as an *auteur*' (p. 113). Throughout the article, there is a refusal to acknowledge that art consists not of an array of critical concepts but of an accumulation of individual works of art. The critic does not analyse individual works of Hawks, he sets out to 'construct a *homo hawksianus*, the protagonist of Hawksian values in the problematic Hawksian world' (p. 81). This work of analysis leads to the conclusion that 'Hawks sees the all-male community as an ultimate; obviously it is very retrograde. His Spartan heroes are, in fact, cruelly stunted' (p. 90). This might, on the surface, seem a damaging admission but Wollen is more than able to cope. If the adventure films of Hawks are limited, add the crazy comedies, season with Hjelmslev, Olrik and Lévi-Strauss and one comes up with a very tasty mixture: 'If we take the adventure dramas alone it would seem that Hawks's work is flaccid, lacking in dynamism; it is only when we consider the crazy comedies that it becomes rich, begins to ferment: alongside every dramatic hero we are aware of a phantom, stripped of mastery, humiliated, inverted' (pp. 93-94). As an example of critical reasoning this proposition is quite beyond the travesty and caricature that Wollen complains have dogged the progress of the *auteur* theory in this country. The logical deduction from the premise that Hawks has created two kinds of one-sided and unsatisfactory films is that Hawks is a limited director, not that there exists a form of imaginary synthesis in which the contrasting tendencies mutually enrich each other.

The same reluctance to see that the work of art must be judged by what it is, not by what distortions an ingenious interpreter can add by referring to other and dissimilar works, is to be found in Wollen's view of what precisely the critic is to analyse. Starting from the fairly commonplace view that 'a director spends his whole life making one film' (p. 104), he concludes that it is the task of the critic to construct this film which 'consists not only of the typical features of its variants, which are merely its redundancies, but of the principle of variation which governs it, that is its esoteric structure, which can only manifest itself or "seep to the surface", in Lévi-Strauss's phrase, "through the process"' (p. 104). The implications of this are that the critic does not see or evaluate the work as it appears on the screen, he is concerned with an idea of the film constructed by himself in the terms of his own theory and with the aid of his prior knowledge of the director.

'Imagine,' he says, 'the situation if the critic had to construct a musical composition from a number of fragmentary, distorted versions of it, all with improvised passages or passages missing' (p. 105). Imagine rather the happy position of the *homo wollenianus*, disregarding the sequences that haven't worked, substituting his favourite actors and actresses for the poor creatures struggling with their parts, rewriting the dialogue to include fervent New Left sentiments, living in a private world with its *musée imaginaire* of semiological delights, while the rest of us, poor souls, merely go to the pictures.

SAMUEL FULLER'S ACTION FILMS

by Kingsley Canham

Sam Fuller is one of a select few directors, who have worked mainly on low budget features, often released as 'B's' or supporting films, but who have at the same time been able to have a large share in the control of their films, and have aroused critical attention.

He has done so by working in the three main 'action' genres of the American cinema – the war film, the western and the crime film – working within a pattern of ideas and personal beliefs expressed in the strongest possible verbal and visual terms. His films have been dismissed in certain quarters as purely action films, but such a view denotes a superficial approach to his style. None of his westerns can be pigeon-holed simply as westerns; similarly his war and crime films are not limited to the clichés of the genres, or to their conventional messages. He does not consciously make 'message' films, because the use of convention and cliché in thematic terms eliminates the individual response of characters' emotions. Instead of making black or white statements or sermonizing, he takes these emotions as a basis for his films, but in so doing, does not avoid the problems related to them.

His experience of crime and the criminal mind is broader than most as it moulded the major part of his formative years. At the age of



House of Bamboo: A sequence from the same footage appears in *Shock Corridor*

seventeen, he was one of the youngest ever crime reporters in the business; starting his newspaper career at fourteen as a copy boy with the *New York Journal*, he soon became personal copy boy for Arthur Brisbane, and also worked with Gene Fowler. From here, he progressed to the position of rewriter on several papers including



China Gate: Mao looms like a Buddha

the *New York Sun Evening Graphic* and the *San Diego Sun*, before being offered a job as a crime reporter. This enabled him to build up the knowledge of the workings of the criminal syndicates, which is so clearly and concisely catalogued in *Underworld USA* (1960). A contemporary reviewer, bemoaning that the film was only to receive a floating release in England, wrote: 'Samuel Fuller's script is orthodox gangster journalism, reminiscent of Hollywood's upper-middle level of ten or fifteen years ago. It combines a kind of Robert Wise investigation into a syndicated vice racket, its hero pursuing his own ends while apparently working for both sides, with a Fritz Lang type story of revenge, callousness and doom. The Forties flavour is accentuated by Harry Sukman's score, which could have come from almost any Bogart-Greenstreet thriller; the Lang atmosphere by the use of dark, shadowy, studio-bound sets and lighting – at times the milieu is similar to that of a cohesion and the conviction of a *Big Sleep* or a *Maltese Falcon*. . . .'

My personal memory of syndicate movies brings to mind Republic 'bread and butter' fare such as *Hoodlum Empire* (1952, Joe Kane), which cashed in on the Kefauver investigations, or *City of Shadows* (1955, John Auer) with a beefy Victor McLaglen falling from a ski-lift as a syndicate gunman catches up with him at a holiday lodge; moving up into the ' sleeper' bracket, Phil Karlson's best film to date, *Phenix City Story* (1956), which dealt with an ex-soldier battling corruption and vice, whilst endeavouring to bring his father's murderers to justice; back down again to the low grade bracket for *Murder by Contract* (1958, Irving Lerner). None of these had the smoothness or incisiveness of Wise's earlier films, but some did have elements of the Lang-type story and atmosphere. The difference in Fuller's approach lies in the attitudes of his heroes and heroines. In the films mentioned above, the heroes are clean-cut, red-blooded American supermen, with the exception of John Russell in *Hoodlum Empire*. He portrays a one-time gangster, trying to go straight, despite the efforts of his uncle who is the king-pin of the New York underworld network. His uncle tries to frame him as a key figure in the rackets, and his friend, a blind ex-Army chaplain, is murdered to stop him ratting to the Crime Commission, thus increasing Russell's motivation to clear his name. Fuller either has his central figures as policemen (Robert Stack in *House of Bamboo* [1955]; James Shigeta and Glen Corbet in *The Crimson Kimono*) or criminals (Richard Widmark in *Pick Up On South Street* [1952] or *Underworld USA* [1960] with Cliff Robertson) drawing little distinction between their behaviour patterns. *House of Bamboo* contains a line in which he crystallizes this attitude: 'The only difference between a cop and a criminal is a little piece of bronze, a badge.'

He wrote the script for *Shockproof* (1948), a programmer directed by Douglas Sirk, early in Sirk's American career, before he had become acclimatized to the American scene. Fuller disowns his connection with the finished work, as Helen Deutsch was called upon to rewrite scenes and altered the ending, destroying Fuller's intended slant. Cornel Wilde plays a parole officer, conditioned to the impersonal approach which his job requires, until parolee murderess Patricia Knight steps into his office. As he brusquely reads off the conditions of her parole, he cannot help paying some attention to her physical attributes. In the previous scene she has been shopping, with the intention that this should happen. Wilde goes through the ropes, finding work and lodging for her, but his reaction when her boyfriend, a gambler (John Baragrey), appears at her rooms, is not motivated solely by his position. Personal reasons begin to dominate his actions; he moves Knight into his house as a companion for his blind mother, who senses her son's attraction toward the girl. Wilde is on the brink of the situation in which most Fuller heroes find themselves sooner or later – they are men who are forced by circumstances or a woman into actions which oppose or contravene the principles by which they have lived. This violation can end tragically, if they are not capable of facing the task, or else it is only partially resolved as in *Run of the Arrow* (1957) with Rod Steiger abandoning his attempts to live as an Indian, returning to face his problem of exorcising his hatred of life in the South after the Civil War; or as in *The Crimson Kimono* where James Shigeta and Victoria Shaw end the film together, but are only beginning to face the problems created by inter-racial sex or marriage. Fuller has never chosen to attempt to present the broader implications of inter-racial harmony, although this is the major theme of *China Gate* (1957) and *The Crimson Kimono*, whilst it is a secondary theme in *The Baron of Arizona* (1949) and *House of Bamboo* – in terms of a male-female relationship. The theme is also to be found in his war films, *The Steel Helmet* (1950); *Fixed Bayonets* (1951); the adventure entertainment *Hell and High Water* (1954) and the anti-German *Verboten* (1958), but it is presented in terms of an all-male society in the latter group.

Wilde is closest to the Widmark character in *Pick Up On South Street* in that his actions are motivated by love, but whereas Widmark and Peters are no more socially orientated at the end of the film than they were at the beginning – he is a pickpocket, she the mistress of a Communist agent – Wilde has been persuaded to return to society to face the consequences of his actions by the girl. This is conceivably due to Deutsch's alterations. Fuller's original script (presumably) had Wilde becoming brutalized by the strain of violating his code, and being killed by the police. The present ending excuses the action of running off to Mexico with her, after she has nearly killed



House of Bamboo: Robbery like a military operation

Baragrey. Because it cannot be taken at face value, a reappraisal brings to light the isolation of the two central characters from the developments.

Wilde begins as an aggressively competent person with a shade of cynicism about his work ('... not in the modern system. They don't spank kids any more.'). Neither he nor Knight are aware of his ulterior motives during the staircase confrontation with Baragrey at the boarding house, thus Knight is successfully intimidated by his order: 'I have authority over you. Tell him to go!' Consequently, she is hesitant about entering a bookie joint with Baragrey later that evening. When she is caught in a police raid, she arrives at the police station just after a brusque Wilde has caused a nervous witness (King Donovan), in line for a twenty year sentence, to kill himself. Wilde tells the psychiatrist interviewing Knight that she ought to be easy to work on but his self-confidence is shaken in a confrontation with Baragrey, whose smooth manner and educated tones irk him. Later Wilde physically attacks Baragrey when he appears at Wilde's home to see Knight.

She assumes the upper hand once Wilde has declared himself, holding her hand in the pictures. His mother tells her to do what she thinks is right and she decides not to let Baragrey transfer her parole order to Los Angeles. She resists the gambler's proposal for her to marry Wilde secretly so that they can blackmail him over his political ambitions – the two most important rules for parolees are that they cannot marry or carry a gun unless authorized. Her split with Baragrey is definite: 'We're through, Harry. I'm no longer asking to say goodbye; I'm just saying it!'

Wilde panics on the flight, forgetting to fill up the car ('It's only fifteen miles to the border, and we are running out of petrol'); a radio broadcast describing them comes on as they are in the gas station so they have to steal the nearest vehicle. This is a newly wed couple's car with signs and tin cans tied to the back; at the border he causes traffic chaos trying to back out of the queue, drawing attention to them after they have safely negotiated the barrier. Similarly, his behaviour in a pawn shop draws sufficient attention for the owner to recognize him. This is not an indication of things to come. The normal role of the Fuller heroine is that of precipitating the action, without dominating it, although Constance Towers is the central figure in *The Naked Kiss* (1963) and Angie Dickinson is in *China Gate* (1957).

The first film in Fuller's 'criminal' set, which he directed was *Pick Up On South Street*. A pickpocket unwittingly steals a message intended for enemy agents, from a girl's bag on a busy subway, and becomes a target for the Communist spy ring. The part of the girl was to be played by Marilyn Monroe, and Zanuck, who was abroad when Fuller completed his script, requested him to hold shooting until Monroe had completed her role in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Fuller had other commitments, and asked that his friend Henry Hathaway be allowed to make the film, but Zanuck refused. Fuller had to proceed without Monroe, but none of the other notable leading ladies to whom the part was offered, was interested. He was offered Jean Peters, but he refused her. Soon after, he was lunching with Henry Hathaway, Ray Kellogg, Leon Shamroy and Henry King, when a girl walked past the table. Fuller asked who she was. It was Jean Peters.

It offered one of her meatiest parts. In a short corporate contract with Fox she made nineteen films, few of which were good. Too often she was a wan suffering type, or the conventional wife in the background. Her best performances came when she was offered rugged aggressive roles as in Jacques Tourneur's *Anne of the Indies* (1951), and *Pick Up On South Street*. She is brashly tarty and hard, in the Stanwyck tradition, as she chews gum in the subway, or drags at a cigarette as she lies in a bubble bath. She shows little concern for boy-friend Richard Kiley's obviously suspicious profession, although she is aware that his concern when she tells of her stolen purse is abnormal. Her involvement in the attempts to find it leads to a burglary attempt on Widmark's shack which ends with him knocking her unconscious. She changes sides as she develops a romantic interest in Widmark, but does all she can to stop him selling the film back to Kiley for \$25,000, even collaborating with the police, and taking a savage beating from Kiley (which included a famous zoom shot of him rubbing gravel into a bleeding gash on her

cheek-bone, cut by most censors). Her actions are not governed by patriotism, but by love. She does not wish to see Widmark bite off more than he can chew by tangling with the organization behind Kiley.

A supporting character of a drunkard (Thelma Ritter), who is sympathetic to the couple, and loses her life because of this attachment, presents another of the recurring figures in the Fullerian world of violence and crime. The definitive portrait is probably that of Beatrice Kay in *Underworld USA* as Sandy, she has known the hero since early childhood, when she ran a neighbourhood bar, which he and his father used to use as a meeting place. She mothers the boy, as she is unable to have children of her own, and resents his upbringing ('Your pa's learning you to be like him . . . he's teaching you how to hustle all right . . . right into the electric chair!'). As she gives him his Christmas present, which she has been keeping in her safe, he eyes the yawning gap with greedy eyes. She closes the safe, he opens the box and takes out a scarf. Fuller cuts to an exterior of four men beating another – seen in shadows on a wall. Sandy, and the boy, Tolly, hear the noise and investigate, ducking low behind dustbins as the assailants run past them. One stumbles, and trips onto the ground (Tolly: 'That was Vic Farrar.' Sandy: 'Forget it if you want to live!'). She leads the way to the crumpled body, as 'Auld Lang Syne' starts softly on the score, the volume increasing as she recognizes the victim. The boy sees it is his father and throws himself on the body sobbing. But Tolly refuses to help any police investigation, telling a man from the District Attorney's office: 'I don't want no help from you cops. I'll get those punks in my own way.'

A montage follows as he develops his plan, with the skill and cunning of a veteran criminal. Finding Farrar is in prison (Wife: 'When's Vic gonna come out? When he's dead!'), Tolly commits a crime, is sent to reformatory, commits another crime, always allowing himself to be caught so that his record can grow, and he can graduate to the same prison as Farrar. When he finally does so, a dozen years later, he discovers Farrar is ill in the hospital, so he cons himself a job as a medical orderly, hovering over his prey. Farrar vaguely recognizes but cannot place him, until Tolly (Cliff Robertson) jogs his memory, after the doctor has given the thumbs down on Farrar's condition. He is blunt about it ('Vic, you're dying! Vic, give me the names so you can meet your Maker with a clean slate'). Farrar does so, begging Tolly's forgiveness, but Tolly only sneers 'Fink!' as the man dies.

He is released, returning to his neighbourhood, where Sandy has been retired from the bar – the Syndicate has taken over, and opened a coffee-bar as a front for drug peddling. She has taken to drink,

but throws her medicine away when he returns, producing yet another tie as a present. She anxiously inquires after his prospects of a job, to which he murmurs in a trance-like state: 'Yeah, I got a job.' One of the names she had mentioned as being involved with the drug racket, is that of one of his father's killers.

She shelters a girl (Dolores Dorn), whom he has saved from the hands of the Syndicate killer, Gus (Richard Rust). Sandy is puzzled by his act – 'That's the first time you ever stuck your neck out for anybody.' – but his act was deliberate, the girl is just another pawn in his scheme. She has led him to the drug store-house; he rings Gus, demanding \$50,000 cash for the return of a package of drugs ('Asking for dough like that's gotta get me to see Gela!'). It does, but the girl is scared and runs away. Tolly finds her, dead drunk in a local park. She describes her fear for him in terms of a film which she had seen with a similar plot – '... only he (the hero) was smart, not like you, because the day's going to come when you want out. And the only way out is on a nice cold marble slab, I know because I got one waiting for me. I know the names, I saw – I *saw* Mr. Smith kill a dame!' This creates an increase in his attention toward her; he even takes remarks like 'Sandy told me how your old man was a nothing, a real nothing, but was a God to you. You must have gotta lot of love in you – I like the way you kiss!' He murmurs 'What was her name?' in her ear.

He suggests she expose herself to the dangers of being a witness against Smith in court. He contacts the man whose aid he had refused at the scene of his father's death, twenty years previously, and tells his story. The girl's calm amazes Driscoll, who asks why she is so collected. 'I did it for Tolly', she replies as Tolly sits with a self-satisfied smirk. Sandy figures in the action once more as Tolly offers



House of Bamboo: Robert Ryan and Shirley Amaguchi

his thanks to the girl: 'I'm gonna set you up in an apartment, that's what I'm gonna do.'

Sandy: 'Do something for me? Do what?'

Tolly: 'I know what's wrong with you, and I don't care. You hear? I don't care. I know.'

This is too much for her, and she slaps him. He tries to apologize and she accepts, carrying on that they have a right to drag themselves out of the gutter into a better life. He becomes quizzical as she proposes, bluntly: 'I want your kids.'

He retorts with a sneer: 'You must be on the needle! Marry you . . . (laughter) . . . marry . . . you!'

She gives up sobbing, but Sandy does not, blasting him for his lack of feeling: 'Why don't you take a good look at yourself? A scar-faced ex-con! She's a giant because she sees something in you, something worth saving. In your head, you are a *midget*!'

Her words hit home, as he proposes later in the course of the film, and agrees to quit the rackets, having reaped his vengeance on his father's killers, but his debt to society is not paid in full. Driscoll demands he help nail the syndicate chief (Robert Emhardt). Tolly has no choice, but in so doing, loses his life. He staggers into an alley, fatally wounded, with Sandy and the girl on his heels, collapses and dies amongst the rubbish. One of Fuller's favourite zooms is used in this scene. Sandy encourages the heart-broken girl: 'You gotta finish the job for Tolly.'

She can only reply: 'He died for nothing,' as Fuller underlines her statement by tracking into his clenched fist for the closing shot of the film. I have quoted the dialogue in some detail to illustrate that he does not like long dialogue scenes ('We're making films, not theatre.'). His economic usage lends itself to the remarkable visual contrasts of his films, but it enables him to cut for contrast, without slowing the action or having to use overlapping dialogue.

The physical resemblance of the chief villain, played by Robert Emhardt, to Sydney Greenstreet, is more than just an 'homage' to the latter actor. He is probably the best example of the obese heavy, invariably a man of polish and education who master minds his criminal operations, but never physically involves himself in the dirty work. Emhardt lacks the cultured accent of a Greenstreet, instead using a nasal tone which brings to mind W. C. Fields. His best moment comes as he witnesses Gus set alight a car, which contains the body of one of Emhardt's lieutenants, whom Tolly has framed as a 'stool pigeon'. Gus returns to Emhardt's car, slipping into the back seat beside him as the car blazes in the background. Emhardt leans over toward the driver, indicating his cigar: 'Give me a light.'



Hell and High Water: The Reds signal a warning

He almost succeeds in evading the avenging Tolly, when Tolly bursts into his private swimming pool at the National Projects building, by flinging a newspaper at him, diverting his aim, but overbalances into the pool where he is no match for the younger man. His body-guard (Neyle Morrow) has been of as much use to him as Elisha Cook Jr. was to Greenstreet in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, John Huston), where he was constantly being knocked about by Bogart. Here, Morrow does have the last laugh, as he fatally wounds the unsuspecting Tolly as he climbs from the pool.

The transference of detail is more fully developed in the structural aspects of their respective gangs. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Greenstreet had only one body-guard, and dubious allies in Peter Lorre and Mary Astor; whilst Emhardt has the security of a respectable front, National Projects, with its swimming pool 'only for the big wheels and under-privileged kids' – Mafia philanthropy to ensure fringe loyalty; his operations are run on the lines of a business with general managers handling dope, vice and gambling. The Italian vice king, Gela (Paul Dubov) reveals the customary appreciation of strong family ties when he tells Tolly: 'Well, I'm a sentimental slob when it comes to families.' Also Emhardt can operate with more anonymity than Greenstreet within his 'business'. It is no accident that an Army recruitment poster can be seen outside the offices of National Projects, nor that Driscoll has a poster/souvenir of the 16th Infantry Division clearly visible on his wall as he briefs his agents on the syndicate set-up in military terms and phrases.

Robert Ryan's organization in *House of Bamboo* (1955) is also run on quasi-military terms. For example, he orders that there are to be no survivors if any of his men are wounded during their raids. His group is comprised of ex-soldiers, renegades or deserters, who have little love for society, knuckling under only to their greed and Ryan's violence. Robert Stack plays an undercover agent and is sent

to Tokyo, posing as a gangster to crack Ryan's protection racket. He senses this respect and responds to it in the same way as the characters do in the masculine, virile, friendships of Howard Hawks's films.

His attraction for Shirley Yamaguchi provided Fuller with material for comment on racialism and the problems of inter-racial marriages, which he expanded into the central theme of *The Crimson Kimono* (1960). The friendship of two detectives, ex-Korean war buddies, is very nearly destroyed when they both fall in love with a girl who is the main witness in a murder case on which they are working. The girl brings to the surface feelings and problems which they have never had to face. Joe Kojaku (James Shigeta) is a Nisei, Charlie Bancroft (Glenn Corbett) a Caucasian American. They had teamed up after the war, working together on a beat in 'Little Tokyo', Los Angeles. The credits unfold over an artist's studio containing an unfinished painting of a girl in a kimono, surrounded by crude modernistic paintings on the walls. The score is lush and loud; suddenly the figure alters with the use of super-imposition, the camera plunges into the signature on the canvas – 'Chris'. Fuller cuts to a crane shot of Los Angeles by night, gaudily lit. The music changes to strident jazz tones. A title reads: 'Main Street – 8 p.m.'; tension is created for experienced audience members. A stripper ends her act, has a quick word with the manager as she heads for her dressing room. Shots ring out as she opens the door. There is a glimpse of a muffled figure in sun-glasses who pursues her into the street, killing her as she tries to lose herself in the crowd.

Fuller's reputation for extreme violence can be repudiated by a careful study of his work. It appears to be extremely violent on first viewing, but the effect is created by his masterly composition and contrast of images. His technical ability is often overlooked by those who dismiss him as purely an 'action director'. For instance there is a scene in *The Crimson Kimono* with Glenn Corbett kissing Victoria Shaw on a bed in his hotel room. The phone rings. He answers it with a look of exasperation, which increases as the caller turns out to be Shigeta. He listens, then explodes into the phone: 'Well, don't do anything foolish, Joe. Did you call for help?' His tone is one of irritation, rather than concern, which disconcerts one as Fuller cuts to the other end of the line where Shigeta really is in trouble. He is being menaced by a giant Japanese wrestler, who is scared witless as the police want him for questioning. A brief but savage fight ensues before he is overpowered. Similarly, in *Underworld USA*, we do not actually witness Tolly's father being beaten to death, it is shown by means of shadows on a wall. Later in the film when Gus has been told to intimidate a witness by killing his child, we see him talk to the child. He dons his dark glasses, gets into his car and moves

off behind the girl who has ridden past on a bicycle. Fuller cuts between shots of the car increasing speed, and the girl pedalling along innocently, but at the moment of impact the camera is fixed on a screaming neighbour who has looked out of her window, and witnessed the crime. In *Run of the Arrow* (1956), as the Sioux prepare to skin Ralph Meeker alive for violating one of their customs, Fuller cuts between several central characters watching their actions and reactions to the unseen sight. For the same reason most of his first film, an adult Western, *I Shot Jesse James* (1949) was shot in close-up to eliminate the physical action.

Fuller contrasts the rhythm of his images, in the same fashion as he contrasts his themes and ideas from film to film. He even uses the cliché or corny scene as a means of developing stylistic points. For instance, when Victoria Shaw openly displays her attraction for Shigeta as he plays Mozart to entertain her after displaying a sensitive interest in her paintings, the dialogue is a risible mish-mash of corn, sentimentality and generalizations about art and life. The key scene leading up to *The Naked Kiss* (1963) is presented in the same terms – to underline character motivation. Shaw is attracted to Shigeta because of his sensitivity, but it is this same sensitivity that prevents him from voicing his feelings for her ('Chris, let's not trigger off a bomb!'). Constance Towers, a prostitute who wishes to alter her way of life, is attracted to Michael Dante because he symbolizes everything she wants from life – education and culture. Thus she does not object when he gives her the naked kiss. She finds out later that he is a pervert who likes young girls. Rod Steiger in *Run of the Arrow* talks to his squaw and tries to explain the meaning of the word 'honeymoon' without much success. The scene is framed in romantic terms, on the shores of a lake with the wind blowing softly through the grass. . . . Later in the film, this squaw who has not understood his simplified explanation, is able to realize and put it to him that he is evading his problem by living as an Indian. She does so in terms far too complex for her vocabulary, though they serve to point out the truth of her statements. Steiger had been teaching her the ways of the white men in the earlier scene, instead of learning the ways of the Sioux.

Contradictions and contrasts abound in Fuller's work, and in his interviews. Is he, for instance, saying that there is a distinction between the racial issues involving Negroes and Japanese? In his war films, both fight for America in the hope that this will eventually lead to their being successfully integrated, but he holds out little hope for them. Some die, others end up in mental asylums. Yet, in *The Crimson Kimono*, Shigeta gets the girl. Possibly, in his latest film, *Explosion* (1969), which he is making for American International, he will offer us his clearest view of the place of the American Negro

in society. The plot concerns a Negro sheriff in one of the Southern states, who is ordered to recapture an escaped Negro killer. He has also offered a new set of characters in *Shark* (1967-8), which ends with the hero and heroine coming to blows. He knocks her overboard, and smokes a cigarette calmly as he watches the sharks tear her to pieces.

Neither of these films, from his description of them, fit the categories in which he has worked previously. Several production companies were involved in the making of *Shark* and for the first time for many years, Fuller did not have complete control of the project. He has since disowned it as it has been re-edited, without his consultation. *Explosion* is interesting in that he rewrote the script but again does not appear to have control over the finished product. It is also the first time he has openly confronted a contemporary problem in contemporary terms. It will be interesting to see if his bitter disenchantment, which has grown increasingly apparent in his later films, will lead him into a break away from his traditional viewpoint of presenting problems through the emotions of his characters.

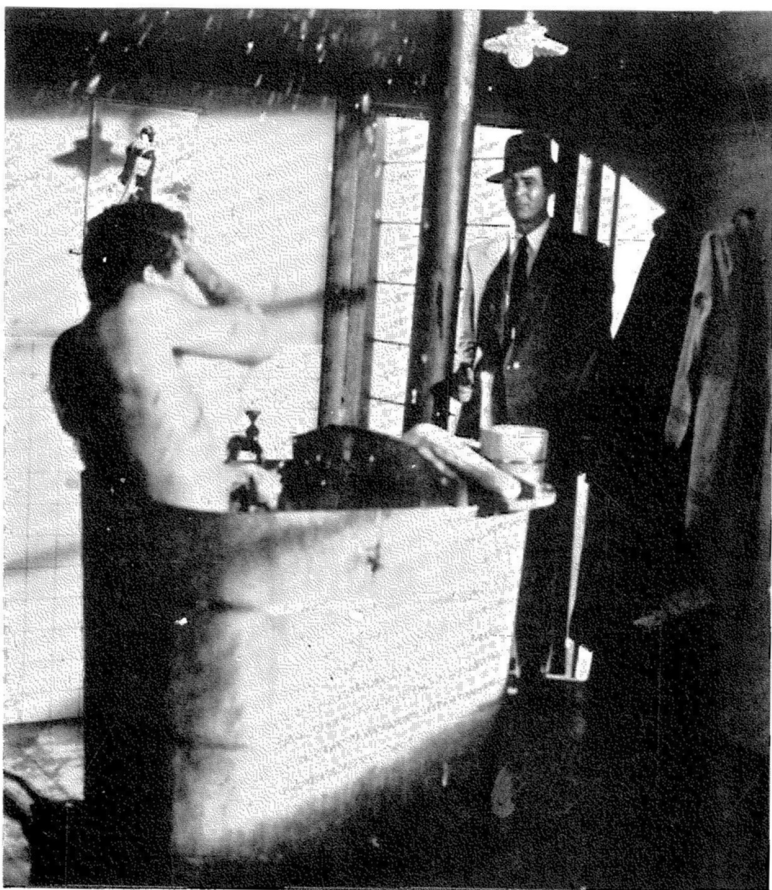
In my view, Samuel Fuller is not a major director, but he is certainly a leading runner in the second ranks. None of his films could be termed dull, though they do tend to lose direction at times – *The Crimson Kimono* ends unsatisfactorily, with the murderer being unmasked as a woman. She has had one scene in the whole film, prior to the finale, a scene which in retrospect sticks out as being pointed, but which makes little sense to the development of the plot at the time. Her pursuit and death too closely resemble the killing at the start of the film. The angles from which it is shot do not make sense. She glances to her side (left) as the camera is tracking with her as she runs through a processional crowd, trying to evade the pursuing Shigeta, who is behind her on her right. On the whole, however, his films are concise and fluid in their development, forceful in characterization and action, and technically accomplished.

Kingsley Canham writes for *Films and Filming*.

SAMUEL FULLER'S GANGSTER FILMS

by Colin McArthur

A chapter from the forthcoming book in the *Cinema One Series Underworld USA*. It is reproduced by permission of the editors.



House of Bamboo: The shooting in the bathtub

There are, in Samuel Fuller's experience and sensibility, three elements which determine the nature of his work: his early career as a crime reporter and pulp novelist, his service as an infantryman in North Africa and Europe during the Second World War, and his intense commitment to America. The first two of these go some way to explaining why he habitually expresses himself through violent genres such as the western, the gangster film and the war film. But irrespective of the genres within which he works, his films display a striking thematic continuity, the core of which is the question of national loyalty. Thus a gangster film such as *Pickup on South Street*, a western such as *Run of the Arrow* and a war film such as *China Gate*, all have central figures forced to make decisions about their national allegiances, or more correctly, who adopt courses of action by which their national allegiances are determined. But allegiance to one nation only is conceivable in Fuller's world, and that nation is America. This leads to inconsistencies in his work. In the film most explicitly concerned with national loyalty, *Run of the Arrow*, a Southerner, O'Meara (Rod Steiger) refusing to live under the Union flag after Lee has surrendered, goes west and joins the Sioux nation. The Sioux capture a brutal and callous Union officer (Ralph Meeker) and according to their cultural traditions, proceed to torture him to death. O'Meara, in an act of mercy, shoots him, thereby demonstrating his instinctual loyalties. He leaves the Sioux nation and returns to the Union. On the surface, this would appear to be a racial rather than a national choice but the lack of consistency with Fuller's other work indicates that to Fuller, the source of transcendental value is the nation rather than the race. For example, in *Hell and High Water*, an American Chinese voluntarily submits to pain, and as it turns out, death, to get information from a man of his own race, a captured Chinese Communist. Also in *Crimson Kimono* one suspects the decision of Christine (Victoria Shaw) to marry the civilized Nisei (James Shigeta) rather than his white friend (Glenn Corbett) is endorsed by the director. The anti-crime forces in *Underworld USA*, Driscoll's staff includes a Nisei, a Negro and a Puerto Rican. Fuller's mystical America subsumes racial loyalties.

Fuller has worked within the gangster film on three occasions: *Pickup on South Street* (1953), *House of Bamboo* (1955) and *Underworld USA* (1960). He has worked once in the related sub-genre of the *film policier*: *The Crimson Kimono* (1959). *Pickup on South Street* appeared at the height of Senator McCarthy's power and was dismissed by critics in Britain as a McCarthyist tract. While it is, indeed, an anti-Communist film, it is much less opportunistically so than these critics would allow. The original story by Dwight Taylor involved drug trafficking: Fuller's scenario changes this to microfilm which a

Communist organization is trying to smuggle out of the United States. It is perfectly consistent with Fuller's attitude to America that he should view Communists as the natural enemy of all America stands for, especially so in the cold war atmosphere of the early fifties. This is substantially the statement of *Steel Helmet* and *Fixed Bayonets* (both about the war in Korea) and *China Gate* (about the French/Viet Minh struggle in Vietnam). Paradoxically, bourgeois America is often defended in Fuller's films by the pariahs of American society – in the war films, psychotic mercenaries going from one war to another and ignorant of the ideological struggle they are engaged on. This is true also of *Pickup on South Street* in which the most violent denunciations of Communism come from Moe and Candy, the one a down-and-out, the other an ex-prostitute, neither of whom has a stake in bourgeois America. Moe (Thelma Ritter) sells Skip (Richard Widmark) both to the police and to Candy, but refuses to sell him to the Communists: 'Even in our crummy kind of business you gotta draw the line somewhere.' Throughout the film, Skip derides appeals to his national loyalty which he dismisses as 'patriotic eyewash' and when he finally brings down the Communist organization it is not because of abstract conceptions of loyalty to America but out of personal vengeance for the beating and wounding of Candy. If *Pickup* is no more than a right wing tract, Fuller has chosen a strange hero and odd mouthpieces for his message.

The political elements in *Pickup* have received an unjustified amount of critical attention despite their existing almost solely in the dialogue. For *Pickup* is, iconographically, a gangster film. The presence of Richard Widmark, with Richard Conte and Victor



Pickup on South Street: The poster on the wall is similar to that on Driscoll's wall in *Underworld USA*. The 16th Army division is that in which Fuller served

Mature, the dominant figure of the genre in the post-war period, helps to establish this, as does Fuller's version of Jean Peters: cheap, provocatively sensual and very much in the tradition of Elizabeth Scott and Marie Windsor in gangster films and thrillers of the post-war period. The milieux within which the action takes place – urban streets and subways, waterfront streets, precinct stations and lavish apartments, place the film solidly within the genre, and the realization of the Communist organization identifies *Pickup* as a *fifties* gangster film. The members of the organization are iconographically indistinguishable from gangsters in other 'syndicate' movies of the fifties: Joey, who is conceived and played as a hood, the cigar smoking executive in charge of 'Security'. Only Joey's immediate superior, with the cigarette holder and tweeds which place him in the bourgeois intelligentsia, looks as if he might be part of an ideologically committed organization. Undoubtedly, Fuller's experience as a crime reporter gives an authenticity and bleakness to the petty criminal world of *Pickup*, the qualities of which he realizes most vividly in the image of Moe's body (referred to as 'number 11') being taken by boat through the darkness to a pauper's grave.

If *Pickup on South Street* offers the paradox of the political film which is at heart a gangster film, *House of Bamboo* offers the paradox of the gangster film which is, more centrally, about war. The pre-credit sequence is a military engagement, a robbery on an army munitions train guarded by American and Japanese soldiers. Typically in Fuller's work the engagement is not frontal, the attackers, dressed as civilians, adopt guerrilla tactics and dispose of the guards with strangling chains. Significantly, the only fatal casualty is an American sergeant. The principal opposition to the criminals therefore becomes not the Japanese police but the American army, and by extension, America itself. Sandy (Robert Ryan), the organizer of the robbery, has gathered round him men discharged with ignominy from the U.S. Army and made them into a para-military unit. Prior to a robbery, his briefing, complete with maps and photographs, is conducted in military terms ('touchdown', 'objective', 'attack', 'terrain'); the gang dons uniform, naval jackets, for the operation and wounded 'casualties' are shot lest they betray the other members of the gang. Fuller has described war as 'organized lunacy' and the figure of Sandy represents his most sustained critique of the supposed military virtues.

Sandy, forever stressing the qualities of control and decisiveness, is consistently wrong in his decisions: his breaking of his own rules by saving Spanier's (Robert Stack's) life when he is wounded in the raid on the cement works; his deduction that Griff is the informer (having characteristically diagnosed Griff's condition as 'battle fatigue'); his assuming that Mariko goes to the Imperial Hotel to see a boy friend



The opening sequence of *Pickup on Southstreet*

rather than, as she does, to pass information to Captain Hanson; his ill-managed attempt to have Spanier shot by the police in the jewellery store. There are indications that under the cool exterior of the 'five star general', Sandy is a psychotic. The truth of Spanier's remark to him that 'a straitjacket would fit you just fine', is demonstrated in the final gun battle in which he pointlessly directs his fire into the crowded street, killing a woman.

It might be thought that Spanier's undoing of, and specifically remorseless killing of the man who befriended him and saved his life, argues a curious coldness in him, and so it would seem, if his motivation were read simply as that of the policeman chasing the criminal; but it goes deeper than this. Both Sandy and his newspaperman informer stress that the Army will never forgive the killing of 'one of their own'. When Spanier without a backward glance leaves Sandy's body in orbit on a children's merry-go-round, his act must be seen in the context of the killing of the sergeant in the pre-credit sequence, the threat this poses for the American Army and ultimately, for America itself. The main impulse of the film therefore, carries implicitly Fuller's recurrent theme of national loyalty. It appears explicitly in the relationship between Spanier and Mariko. Unlike many of Fuller's heroines, Mariko is not a former prostitute seeking a better life. She is in many ways more courageous, taking on, in the eyes of her community, the role of the Japanese equivalent of the prostitute, the kimono girl, in order to assist Spanier. Her refinement is indicated by her keeping the nape of her neck covered

by her hair (unlike the genuine kimono girls), by her horrified response at Sandy's party when the kimono girls change from a demure Japanese dance to a wild American jive, and by her lowering of the lattice screen between Spanier's mattress and her own. This image is complex, encapsulating the barriers, sexual, moral and cultural, which exist between her and Spanier. But, like other Fuller characters, she too chooses America, not out of abstract loyalty to it, but initially out of revenge for the death of her American husband and, latterly, out of love for Spanier.

The idea of national identity is explicit at the centre of *The Crimson Kimono*. Typical of Fuller, Charlie Bancroft (Glenn Corbett) and Joe Kojaku (James Shigeta) met 'in a foxhole in Korea', their friendship, forged in defence of America against the great menace, Communism. As police officers, they work as a team and even share an apartment. Crucially, the apparent racial hatred between the two caused by their both falling in love with Chris (Victoria Shaw) provokes in Joe a crisis of *national* identity: 'What am I, American Japanese, Japanese



Pickup on Southstreet: Candy attempts to get some information from Joey. She is beginning to appreciate Skip McCoy's point of view

American, Nisei? What label do I live under?' Filled with doubt Joe decides to turn in his badge and, quitting the Caucasian world, returns to Little Tokyo, the Japanese quarter of Los Angeles. The theme of national identity and the narrative of the film, the tracking down of the killer of Sugar Torch, are in almost Shakespearian symmetry, for Roma has killed Sugar Torch out of jealousy and dying in Joe's arms, she tells him that she has misread her lover's response to the burlesque dancer because of the intensity of her own state of mind. Joe realizes he has misread the look on Charlie's face for racial disgust when it was in fact 'plain, honest, down to earth hatred'. Although his friendship with Charlie has been destroyed, for Fuller this is secondary; for Joe has returned from the ghetto, to become once again part of America, the rightful role of the Nisei. Fuller celebrates this role in the sequence in the Nisei military cemetery, drawing our attention to the tributes of Dwight Eisenhower and Mark Clark to the bravery and loyalty of the Nisei troops, and, the crucial act of acceptance, to the grave of one Nisei, posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honour in America's great contemporary Armageddon – Korea.

The Crimson Kimono is perhaps the most useful film within which to consider the question of Fuller's style, for it is one of his most uneven films, containing sequences as brilliantly realized as anything he has done and others among his weakest. In each case, the success and failure is directly relatable to Fuller's attitude to and degree of involvement with the sequences in question. The centre-piece of *Kimono*, and arguably one of the finest sequences in the cinema, is the scene in which Joe and Charlie indulge in a bout of kendo and Joe's pent-up jealousy explodes, causing him to flout the rules and batter Charlie into unconsciousness. The ritual and stasis of the ceremonial exchanges before the bout give way to the untrammelled ferocity of Joe's attack, which is intercut with close-ups of the horrified Nisei judge, whose angry face reflects the dishonour Joe has brought to their community. Fuller has often spoken of his work in terms of journalism, even speaking of certain cinematic effects as headlines. This is as apt a description of the kendo sequence as it is of the opening evocation of Los Angeles with headline-like rubrics flashed on the screen and the shooting of the half-naked Sugar Torch in the street. This is the world Fuller knows and understands and his integrity in relation to it is reflected in his technique in putting it on film. Quite the contrary is true of the sequence in which Chris raises with Joe the possibility that he loves her. Chris is a painter and Joe plays the piano and their growing involvement with each other is conveyed through a dialogue about Art. Their view – and Fuller's – of Art is a debased Romantic view compounded of Delicacy and Sadness. The sentimentalized abstractions determine the mood of

the whole sequence, which accordingly lacks vitality on the part of the actors (less Victoria Shaw than James Shigeta) and also on the part of the director. Fuller is here looking at an experience from the outside: his view of art is a crass one, the view of a crime reporter. No such problem arises in discussing *Underworld USA*, the most evenly achieved of Fuller's films. The bleakness of its world has no room for sentimentalized abstractions.

In relation to the syndicate cycle of gangster films, *Underworld USA* is of classical purity: one man, motivated by revenge, brings down the criminal organization. Mortally wounded, he staggers from the luxurious penthouse pool where the climactic act of violence occurs, to die among the garbage cans in an alley in which as a youth (at the beginning of the film) he watched his father being beaten to death by the men he ultimately destroys. It is Fuller's most unequivocally *genre* film in which he handles the iconography with great facility, yet it is no less personal than his other works. Tolly Devlin (Cliff Robertson) is the typical Fullerian hero, the infiltrator and double-agent, serving both the syndicate and Driscoll. He gives, however, allegiance to neither, intent only on destroying Gela, Gunther and Smith, the men who killed his father. More clearly than any other Fuller hero, Tolly plays both ends against the middle. When Driscoll wants to pause after the destruction of Smith and Gunther, Tolly induces him to believe that Gela will cooperate with the Federal Crime Committee and at the same time induces Connors, the boss of the syndicate, to believe that Gela is selling him out. For Tolly the war is over after the death of Gela: he has no quarrel with Connors or the syndicate and like Skip McCoy in *Pickup* derides Driscoll's appeal about the defence of society. When he does decide to destroy Connors it is because of the latter's threat to Cuddles. Yet once more the decision, for Fuller, makes Tolly the defender of 'a clean America' for as Tolly drowns Connors in his opulent swimming pool, a newspaper, floating in the water, makes clear the polarities in its now ironic headline 'Connors Defies Uncle Sam'.

Typically, Fuller sees the confrontation between Uncle Sam and the syndicate as a war. Driscoll, surrounded by his multi-racial staff, with mementoes of the Sixteenth Infantry Regiment decorating his walls, describes the syndicate's leaders as its 'top brass' and its activities in the imagery of military strategy. Connors too, observes that if the syndicate maintains its legitimate fronts, tax returns and charitable donations, it will 'win the war'. One of the dimensions of Fuller's hatred of war is the disruptive effect it has on families, specifically in the creation of orphans. This is related to his general awareness of the vulnerability of children and his concern for their proper education and well-being. The final shoot-up in *House of Bamboo* occurs in a children's playground, the ex-prostitute in *The*

Naked Kiss teaches in a school for orphan children and there are orphans in *Steel Helmet*, *China Gate* and *Run of the Arrow*. However, *Underworld USA* contains Fuller's most complete response to the idea of family solidarity and children. Tolly Devlin is orphaned by three of the top men in the syndicate and the mainspring of his motivation is loyalty to his dead father. His single-minded pursuit of revenge leads to some of the most coldly remorseless acts in the cinema: the withholding of forgiveness from the dying Vic Farrar, the dragging of the gasping and pleading Gela to his front door to be shot down by the waiting Gus, the drowning of Connors by standing on him as he lies at the bottom of the pool. The concern with filial piety is restated throughout the film: Gela observes that he wishes his son felt about him as Tolly feels about his father and the figure of the corrupt police chief, Flower, is presented in terms of his daughter's loyalty to him when he reveals he has been on the take. The threat of the syndicate's violence is most often directed against the families of its enemies, horrifically exemplified in the running down of Jenny Mencken by Gus and, ironically, the syndicate's most spectacular act of social responsibility is to throw open its swimming pool regularly to the under-privileged children of the city with Gus acting as lifeguard. Mother figures are common in Fuller's work (Moe in *Pickup*, Mac in *The Crimson Kimono*), but none is presented so explicitly as Sandy in *Underworld*. Unable to have children, she surrounds herself with dolls and photographs of babies, acts as a surrogate mother for Tolly as a boy by patching up his wounded face, and does the same for Cuddles, even feeding her milk. Cuddles's commitment to Tolly is expressed in her wish to have Tolly's children. The scene in which she suggests, and he incredulously rejects, the idea of marrying her is carefully composed round the picture of a baby above the bed.

Perhaps more than any other Hollywood director, Samuel Fuller has been ignored or reviled by Anglo-American film critics. That this is so is due to the brash quality of his film style (which has been accurately described by Peter Wollen, after Eisenstein, as 'cinemafist'). Uninterested in literary primitives, these critics mistake a film primitive like Fuller for an impersonal, commercial hack. Yet with the possible exceptions of John Ford and Elia Kazan, no Hollywood film maker has so consistently explored the American psyche.

Colin McArthur is Editor of Film Materials in the Education Department of the BFI.

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With Eisenstein in Hollywood

Ivor Montagu (Seven Seas Books) Berlin 1968
(available from Collets) 6s.

A sad and nostalgic autobiographical piece which describes Ivor Montagu's inability to break through as a director and his later attempts to work with Eisenstein in Hollywood. The advent of sound could not be incorporated in the Soviet Second Five Year Plan, and like others, Eisenstein was attracted to Hollywood to investigate its possibilities. The book describes the shift from *Sutter's Gold* to *An American Tragedy* and the eventual destruction of *Que Viva Mexico* (the remainder of which Upton Sinclair has kept out of the Soviet Union) Eisenstein's scenarios for *Sutter's Gold* and *An American Tragedy* on which Ivor Montagu worked with Eisenstein, are printed here.

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Split Focus

Peter Hopkinson (Rupert Hart-Davis) 1969 126s.

Peter Hopkinson's account is mainly devoted to his experiences in Persia, North Africa, Yugoslavia and Greece whilst working for the Army Film and Photographic Unit during the last war, and in post-war India, Pakistan, China and Egypt whilst working for 'March of Time'. Despite the author's honest approach, the book is little more than a pedestrian account of current affairs during the period and adds very little to our knowledge of the documentary area of films – an area which has been sadly neglected in print. Only in the last chapter, describing the filming of *Fidelio* in Austria in 1955, does Peter Hopkinson as the *film maker* come alive.

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This collection of essays is too general in scope: subjects range from the sociological to the critical and the essays themselves are in many cases journalistic. Had the book achieved its stated aim of showing the conflict and tension between individual and institutional goals within the 'total situation' of films and television, it might have been interesting. Unfortunately, there is no clear development of this thesis.

Note

Secker & Warburg has consistently declined to let us have a review copy of *The Parade's Gone By* by Kevin Brownlow.

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Dear Sirs,

Robert O'Meara's 'critical account' of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (which appeared in *Screen* 1) is totally inadequate.

Far from being a possible or tangential idea, the concept of God forms the core of the film, as Kubrick himself acknowledged in a *Playboy* interview. *2001* both criticizes the conventional idea and suggests a possible new concept. If the idea of God is at all meaningful, he may exist as a different, much more highly-developed form of life. The monoliths which appear in *2001* are the technology of these god-like beings and therefore function as magically – i.e. inexplicably – for us as a television set would for a

primitive African. In each case, the appearance of the monoliths drives man on to new heights of achievement: material in the first two cases – the use of the bone and the creation of the giant Jupiter spacecraft; and mental in the last, where Dave comes into contact with the aliens. Why the aliens help us, we're not told; but it's plain that Kubrick's idea is a scientific version of the 'Death of God' theology, which denies the usual omniscience, omnipotence etc. and replaces it with the idea that God is only potentially omniscient etc. – that he is reliant on our growth for his own, and hence needs us. (Incidentally, such interference has been suggested before, in Nigel Neal's *Quatermass*

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and the Pit – and furthermore the linguist Noah Chomsky has recently argued that evolutionary theory as yet doesn't adequately explain the development of language in human beings.)

The criticism of the conventional concept of God is handled less explicitly (more in terms of consequences) than the other theme. The space sequences, up to the descent into the lunar pit display, in Floyd's constant dozing, in the behaviour of the air hostesses and of the Russian scientists, and most noticeably in the extremely banal dialogue (predicting that of the real astronauts!) demonstrate the gap in human sensibilities left by the decay of conventional religion – a decay speeded up by the rise of science in the last century. These space adventurers are virtually zombies – they show no reaction at all to the unknown of the universe, which here amounts to the same thing. Their hermetically sealed minds are proof even against the discovery of extra-terrestrial intelligence in anthropological terms, their culture (i.e. ours) gives them no means of assimilating the potentialities of the unknown and they react by ignoring it. (We may note, however, that Floyd and company are administrators rather than pure scientists). Faced with such insulation, no wonder the monolith activates just as they line up like big-game hunters, to have their snapshots taken with it. Given the situation, what action could be more crassly complacent?

The 'Discovery' sequence and the final sequence, of course, show Dave (Kubrick's Ulysses and hence representative twenty-first century scientific man) slowly being

stripped of such complacency, first by the battle with the scientific ex-servant, the outlaw computer, which clearly has the same ambivalent relationship (tool and/or weapon) to man as the bone; and then by his encounter with the alien intelligence, during the roller-coaster light trip (really a *welcome*, in terms of Blakean energy and joy) and during the visions of the galaxies and of Jupiter's (the king of the gods, remember) surface. The unknown is forcing itself, terrifyingly – past the indifference – see the flash-shots of Dave's agonized face. The final sequence shows not Dave's physical meeting with the aliens (impossible since they are beyond material form) but what he learns from the mystic sequence of mental contact with them. What we watch is the death of an outmoded idea – the anthropomorphic conception of God in man's own image (hence Dave as the white-haired God-figure in a luxurious Heaven) and the resulting birth of a new super-being. Naturally, Dave can only absorb what he learns in these *mythological* terms. Man has been 'reborn' (as a result of contact with these forces) with infinitely greater knowledge of the universe. Thus, the final incandescent image of the foetus, buttressed by the use on the soundtrack of Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* music (which indicates in 2001 the presence of God).

Although there's not space to discuss it here, Kubrick's choice and use of Ligeti's Mass (with the heretical circular structure) clinches this interpretation of 2001.

Yours sincerely,
John Lindsay Brown,
Cumbernauld, Scotland.

BRITISH CINEMA

Reading list compiled by GILLIAN
HARTNOLL, Librarian, British Film Institute

The literature on the British cinema is chiefly distinguished by its paucity, although there are a few new books in the pipeline, the most imminent being Lindsay Anderson by Elizabeth Sussex (Studio Vista, Autumn 1969, Movie Paperbacks series). For this reason I have included a few titles which are out of print, but they are all books which should be fairly readily available through the public library system.

BIOGRAPHIES

With the shortage of general books, biographies of leading figures in the industry are more than usually important for their background information.

BALCON, Michael

Michael Balcon presents . . . a lifetime of films. Hutchinson, 1969.
239 pp., plates, index.

HEPWORTH, Cecil M.

Came the Dawn: memoirs of a film pioneer. Phoenix House, 1951.
207 pp., plates.

TABORI, Paul

Alexander Korda. Oldbourne, 1959.
324 pp., plates, filmog.

PEARSON, George

Flashback: the autobiography of a British film-maker. Allen & Unwin, 1957.
236 pp., plates, filmog.

WOOD, Alan

Mr. Rank: a study of J. Arthur Rank and British films. Hodder & Stoughton, 1952.
288 pp., front.

WILCOX, Herbert

Twenty-five Thousand Sunsets: the autobiography of Herbert Wilcox. Bodley Head, 1967.
233 pp., plates, index.